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THE PRINCESS TARAKANOVA

THE PRINCESS TARAKANOVA.



*The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye.*

*To give reproofance to her love
And wring his bosom is to do*

THE
PRINCESS TARAKANOVA
A Dark Chapter of Russian History

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
OF
G. P. DANILEVSKI
BY
IDA DE MOUCHANOFF

WITH FOUR PORTRAITS



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INTRODUCTION.

GREGORY PETROVITCH DANILEVSKI was born at Danilovki, an estate in the government of Kharkov, on April 14th, 1829. He died last winter at St. Petersburg, on December 6th. His childhood over—it was spent partly on the estate of his grandfather, near Dontsov, partly on the estate of Petrovski—he became a student first of the Muscovite Institute for the nobility, afterwards of the University of St. Petersburg, leaving the latter, in 1850, as graduate in jurisprudence. In 1848, during his studentship, he was presented with a silver medal at the meeting of the Philological Institute for his composition on Poushkin and Kriloff.

From 1850 to 1857 he served in the ministry of public instruction, at first under Noroff, afterwards under Prince Viazimski. During this period he visited Finland and the Crimea, and worked, by commission from the Archaeological Society, on the archives of the monasteries of the governments of Kharkov, Koursk, and Poltava, and, at the sugges-

tion of the historian Oustrialoff, wrote a description of the famous battlefield of the last-named place. In 1856, at the instance of the Imperial admiral, Constantine Nicolaievitch, he was sent to the south of Russia to write a description of the Sea of Azov, the Dneiper, and the Don. In the following year he resigned his official appointment. Thereafter, for twelve years, he lived at Petrovski, his own favourite estate in Kharkov, from time to time, however, paying visits to Poland, White Russia, Volhynie, and Podolia, and sailing down the Volga, Don, and Dnieper. Made in 1859 deputy of the committee of Kharkov for improving the condition of the peasantry, he was instructed four years later, by Golovinin, the minister of public instruction, to inspect and to report on the condition of 200 national schools in the government of Kharkov. During the first three years of the establishment of the rural police courts he served by election. Despatched to St. Petersburg in 1868 as a deputy by the government of Kharkov, he had the honour of being presented to the emperor. From 1867 to 1870 he held the post of honorary justice of the peace. Finally, in 1869, on the institution of the official organ, "The Government Herald," he was appointed senior assistant to the chief editor. This post he occupied eleven years.

His historical novels have created quite a sensation in Russia by reason of their originality, their fascination, and their truthfulness to history and to nature. Among the more celebrated of his numerous works, besides the novel of which a translation is here presented, are “Merovitch” and “Freedom.” As Danilevski has, hitherto, been unknown in England, some remarks on his writings will be of interest.

With regard to the sad history contained in this book, it is evident that the author had exceptional information on the subject of his narrative, for he is not over-careful to conceal his opinion of the strong probability of the Princess Tarakanova’s claims being legitimate as well as bonâ-fide, and of Orloff’s real character being greatly different from the popular estimate of it as expressed in the lines under the count’s portrait. It is not known how the remarkable diary which constitutes Part I. of this work came into Danilevski’s hands; but there is ground for the conjecture that it came to him, with other papers, from his grandmother. A curious fact, too, is the circumstance that Danilevski’s governess was a lady of the name of Pchelkina. However this may be, my husband, Colonel de Génie de Mouchanoff, was informed by Danilevski himself that the diary as published is almost word for word as written by Konsov, and

that the details concerning the subsequent history of the captive were obtained by him from authentic official documents.

Nevertheless, Danilevski's view is not the popular one. Schébalski and Solovieff in dealing with this subject write as follows :—

“ When Russia was involved in the war with Turkey some evil-minded persons availed themselves of the opportunity to bring forward pretenders to the throne. They set rumours afloat to the effect that Elizabeth, after her secret marriage with Count Razoumovski, had a daughter, and that this child was she who was known by the name of Princess Tarakanova.

“ The adventures of this Pretender form a very interesting page in Russian history, and have given rise to many novels and tales. They have now, however, lost much of their mysterious interest, thanks to the extracts printed from the procés of Princess Tarakanova, not long since published in one of our historical reviews. Still, it is an ascertained fact that the Princess spent several of the years of her youth abroad, and that she led a luxurious though retired life. Very likely the tie between this person and the Russian Empress may have been known to political intriguers, and have suggested to them the idea of using this Pretender

as an instrument for raising a revolution in Russia. There is every reason to believe that Prince Radzivill, the leader of the confederation of Radomski, educated a young girl with this object in view ; but whether this girl became the future Tarakanova, or some other person, is to this day, and most probably will remain eternally, unknown.

“ What is really ascertained is that a young girl of very humble origin, a native of Prague or Nuremberg, endowed with the most marvellous beauty, clever and enterprising, but of extremely equivocal conduct, shone from the end of the year 1760 till the beginning of 1770 at Berlin, London, and Paris, lavishly spending on her dress and pleasures the money which she had levied on her admirers. With every new residence she changed her name. In Paris she was the “ Princess Wladimirskaya,” a native of Russia, but brought up, it was said, in Persia, as mischief was feared at the hands of her enemies in Russia, where, so she alleged, she had great possessions. We are bound, indeed, to believe that her charms were extraordinary ; for notwithstanding her conduct, several highly placed personages, in both France and Germany, sought her hand. One of these was actually a reigning Prince of the German Empire. In 1773, the mysterious adventuress was on the point of accept-

ing the hand of this prince, but postponed the matter under pretence of starting for Russia to arrange her affairs, and then suddenly disappeared. In the spring of 1774 she turned up at the other side of Europe—at Venice.

“It was then that her political rôle really began. As early as 1773 she had had relations with several Poles, who had left their native land shortly after the conspiracy of Baski, and it is not unlikely that it was at this time that the programme of her future actions was arranged. The Princess Vladimirskaya was to take the name of the “Princess Tarakanova,” set sail for Constantinople on a ship which Radzivill had offered to equip, and there explain to the Sultan her pretensions to the Russian throne. It was evidently the opinion of her advisers that her appearance on the Danube at the very moment when Pougachoff was raising a rebellion on the Volga would increase the difficulties of Ekaterina’s position, and would be taken advantage of by Turkish politicians. As a matter of fact, in the summer of 1774, the Princess Tarakanova and Prince Radzivill, accompanied by a numerous suite, did set sail for Constantinople. But they stopped at Ragusa, wishing to ascertain beforehand what kind of reception they were likely to meet with at the hands of the Sultan. Unfortu-

nately for them, great changes had taken place. The overtures of the Princess were not only declined: she was even invited to give up all thought of her visit.

“ Separated from Radzivill, but not from her political rôle, the Princess went first to Naples and then to Rome. At the latter city she tried to bring to her side all the most influential cardinals, and even the Pope himself, promising that in the event of her accession to the throne she would do all in her power to establish the Catholic faith in Russia.

“ During all these péripéties Count Orloff Chemenski was, as we all know, in Italy. Of course he lost no time in writing full particulars concerning the false Tarakanova to Ekaterina, from whom he received orders to steal the Pretender, and so cut off the intrigue at the very outset. Orloff surrounded the Princess with spies, and, through his emissaries, tried to inspire her with confidence in himself. The words of the emissaries seemed very credible to the Princess. Gregory Orloff was then in disgrace, and it would be no very unlikely circumstance if his brother turned into a secret enemy of the empress, and joined in the intrigue. Orloff placed boundless credit at her disposition; and by giving himself out as a man deeply outraged by the government, persuaded the “ Countess Selinski,” as

the Princess then called herself, to come to a rendezvous with him at Pisa. Here he surrounded her with all possible homage. Balls and fêtes succeeded each other in swift succession. He made believe to fall in with her plans, and eventually offered her his hand. Nevertheless, he was only awaiting an opportunity to arrest her, without causing any scandal. He had not long to wait. One day the Countess Selinski expressed a wish to visit the Russian squadron, then stationed at Livorno. Orloff gave orders for preparations to be made for a magnificent reception of the countess, and arranged splendid naval manœuvres. He himself, with her suite, accompanied her on board the man-o'-war. The manœuvres began; the cannon fired; sails were unfurled; the ships sailed out into the open sea; and the unfortunate Pretender, at the end of a journey, found herself shut up in the fortress of Petersburg. Here, it is said, she languished till 1776, when she was drowned by the rushing of the waters into her prison. But this is not true. Historical documents prove that she died of the same illness from which she was suffering when she came to Russia, and which, of course, made rapid strides during her confinement in the damp dungeon."

Remarkable as is "The Princess Tarakanova,"

it is not regarded in Russia as so fine a work as "Merovitch." This work has attracted universal attention, for it describes one of the most interesting epochs of Russian history. The mysterious and melancholy account of the unfortunate prince-martyr, the victim of troublous times, is all the more interesting as it is founded on historical documents. Written with great entrain and truthfulness, the novel on its publication created quite a sensation. It originally appeared in 1875, under the title, "The Imperial Prisoner," but its sale was prohibited. In 1879 it was again printed, by order of the emperor.

"The whole canvas of the novel," says Danilevski, "such as the life and infatuation of Merovitch, the customs and manners of the period, many details of the reign of Ekaterina and the attempt of Merovitch, are taken from the diary and reminiscences of my great-grandmother, and of my grandmother, who was Fräulein at the court of Peter III. Many things I took down from the lips of my uncle, the eldest son of my father's mother,—a born Rosslavleff, who, together with Orloff, as every one knows, played so conspicuous a part in the Coup-d'État which placed Ekaterina on the throne. But in all that belongs to history, I have, of course, strictly adhered to authentic documents from the Imperial

archives. I have also had access to the archives of the citadel of Schlusselburg, to the official documents of the council of Archangel, and I have visited the celebrated dungeon of the unfortunate Prince Johann Antonovitch, and the birthplace of ‘Merovitch.’”

“Merovitch” is thus a detailed account of the Coup-d’État which placed Ekaterina on the throne of Russia, and of the conspiracy and attempt to put Johann Antonovitch on the throne, which was his by right.

An officer named Merovitch penetrated into the citadel above referred to, and hoping to surprise the sentinels and throw them off their guard, read a proclamation, trusting to be able in the confusion to facilitate the escape of the unfortunate prince. But long before strict orders had been given (it is supposed by Ekaterina) that at the first attempt at escape on the part of the prince he was to be killed on the spot. This command was strictly carried out. When Merovitch entered the prince’s cell, he found only the dead body of the unfortunate martyr.

Ekaterina II. plays so important a part in the events described in these novels that some particulars of her life and character may not be out of place.

She was born in the year 1729, at Stettin. Her father, a general in the Prussian service, and

the governor of this town, inherited by the death of his cousin, the Prince of Zerbst, a small principality, situated on the borders of the Elbe, between Prussia and Saxony.

Her mother came of the house of Holstein. Princess Sophie Augusta of Anhalt-Zerbst was therefore distantly related to her future husband. She came over to Russia in her fourteenth year with her mother, and was at once instructed in the Russian faith and tongue. The following year, 1745, having been baptized into the Greek faith under the name of Ekaterina Alexéevna, she was united to the heir of the Russian empire.

Her husband on his accession to the throne excited the discontent of the nation by publishing a great number of ukases, which, although in themselves most humane and wise, yet, owing to the uncivilized state of Russia, were in their nature far too premature. Above all, he outraged the national feeling by the treaty which he concluded with Prussia on April 24th, 1762, by which Russia returned to Prussia all forts, citadels, and towns taken in the last war. His Imperial Highness wished, it was said, to give to the world an example of abnegation and generosity. It was a marvellous event; but although nations like to see in their sovereigns high moral qualities, they also desire

that advantages for which they have worked hard and shed their blood should not be wholly thrown away. By this one act Peter III. raised the whole nation against him.

Ekaterina, his consort, had won a great many adherents by her beauty, grace, and accomplishments, and many true friends among the nobility. Exceedingly ambitious, she had—with the view, as we may suppose, of one day ascending the throne—made herself thoroughly well acquainted with Russian legislation and European politics; and being as deeply devoted as her husband was profoundly indifferent to the Greek Church and its ceremonies and symbols, and having in this way established herself in the affections of the Russian peasantry—so superstitiously reverential to their Church,—she found it no difficult matter to supplant her less capable and unpopular partner. He, as is well known, not only ill-used her, but was unfaithful to her. Indeed, it was rumoured that the fate of the unfortunate Princess Eudoxie (who had been forced to take the veil) was awaiting her. Her successor was even named—viz., the niece of the chancellor Vorontzoff, a woman who, as all contemporary writers say, was not only ugly and deformed, but also most insignificant and illiterate. Meanwhile, Ekaterina's conduct had been wholly irre-

proachable. She was then at Peterhoff, leading a most retired life, but sometimes meeting her adherents, especially the two Orloffs, and the Princess Dashkoff.

The Coup-d'État was to have taken place on June 29th, at the patronal fête of the emperor; but the arrest of Passek, captain of the regiment of Préobrajenski, together with the order given to the army to march against Denmark, brought about the crisis. Rumours had been set afloat that the empress was in danger. The guards, who were all devoted to the empress—40 officers and about 10,000 privates—noisily demanded to be sent to Oranienbaum, to the defence of their beloved empress. One of the privates rushed to Captain Passek, exclaiming that the empress was in danger, that an ukase ordering her arrest had been issued. Passek answered that it was all nonsense. The private, horrified, rushed to another officer, who on hearing the news, and learning that he had been to Passek, then on duty, arrested him and led him to Voyeïkoff. And the latter, in his turn, arrested Passek, and sent a report to Oranienbaum. Of course the arrest of Passek threw the whole regiment, as well as the conspirators in other regiments, into a panic. It was decided to send Orloff to Peterhoff to escort the empress to Petersburg.

It was six o'clock in the morning when Orloff

reached Peterhoff. He knocked at the empress's door, walked in, and very coolly said, "It is time to get up; all is ready!" "What! how?" exclaimed Ekaterina. "Passek is arrested," answered Orloff. Ekaterina asked no more questions, but, hastily dressing, took her seat inside the carriage. Orloff sat by the coachman; another officer, Bibikoff, rode at the door. They made straight for the barracks of Ismaïloff. The alarm was given. Soldiers ran out, surrounded the empress, kissing her hands, her garments, calling her their "saviour." Two soldiers led a priest up, and all crowded to her to take the oath of allegiance. The empress was invited to take her place in the carriage again. The priest, with the cross, went on ahead. Soon they all arrived at the barracks of Simeon, followed by the two regiments. These accompanied her to the cathedral of Kazan, where the Archbishop Dimitri met her. The Te Deum was sung, and Ekaterina Alexéevna was proclaimed Empress of Russia, and Pavel Petrovitch, her son, heir to the throne, 28th June, 1762.

On leaving the cathedral the empress was driven to the Winter Palace, where she took up her residence.

Meanwhile, Peter III. was quite ignorant of these events. At the very time when Ekaterina was

being proclaimed empress, he was preparing to start with a large and brilliant suite for Peterhoff, where, as had been before decided, his fête was to be celebrated. An officer, Goodovitch, who had gone on before, suddenly returned with all haste and whispered softly to Peter that the empress had left the palace long ago, and was now nowhere to be found. The emperor, in a passion, jumped out of his carriage and walked rapidly to the pavilion “*Mon-Plaisir*,” but found nothing save his consort’s ball-dress, ready for the fête. “*Did I not tell you she was bold enough for anything?*” was Peter’s first exclamation. Originally, it was the intention of Peter to assert his rights; but the representations of his friends, the small number of his followers, and the fervour shown to the new empress, all combined to shake his resolution, and the same day he signed his abdication.

Seven days later he died in the palace of Ropshoe—poisoned, as it is supposed.

Ekaterina died on November 6th, 1796, at the age of 67.

In estimating the character of this famous woman, we must not judge her actions as we should those of a private person. Indeed, in reflecting on the lives of those who have, it may be said, to answer for the welfare and prosperity of nations, we should

never forget the fact that these high personages have often, sometimes against their own feelings, to sacrifice the life of one for the well-being of thousands. Nor should we fail to take into account the character of the times in which Ekaterina ascended the throne. When her reign is compared with the reigns of those who preceded her, it appears in any but an unpleasant light. Indeed, it is impossible not to admire the empress for the humanity of her laws, and for the example she set to all her court in frugality, industry, and simplicity.

The poet Derjavin wrote an ode in her honour, in which he contrasted her manner of living with that of her courtiers. She rose very early, was always occupied, devoted several hours every day to new projects, laws, etc., for different institutions, more often she went on foot than she drove. Her table was most frugal, although of course she had every luxury at her command. Cards were all the rage then, especially the most hazardous game of “Faro,” which as grand-duchess she had been made to play at court. But after she ascended the throne she never played at games of chance again. She did not care very much for masquerade balls, only taking part in them on solemn occasions.

On her accession she found all legislation, all administration of justice in most frightful chaos, but

reduced everything to order. “Of darkness she made light.” Justice could no longer be bought or sold.

She was never proud: to the meanest of her subjects always easy of access. Nor was she ever offended at hearing the unvarnished truth—witness her polemic with Von Viesing. She did not resent the most bitter criticism.

By an ukase she put down a most horrible institution called *Slovo-i-diélo*,¹ which somewhat resembled the Star Chamber. So strict had the laws been that people could be brought to the torture for having whispered at their own tables one to another; for not having drunk the health of the reigning Sovereign; for having scratched out the Imperial name and rewritten it; for having dropped money on which was stamped the Imperial effigy. Very differently from one of her predecessors, Anna Johannovna, she did not exact that her courtiers should be sitting on baskets in rows along the rooms through which she had to pass from the chapel to her own rooms, and cackle like hens. Nor used she to slap her courtiers’ faces. She built no ice palace to marry her jester and jestress in; she allowed none of her favourites to blacken with soot the faces of the proud old aristocracy, “to make an empress laugh.” She was the first to

¹ Lit., word and deed.

teach her subjects self-respect. She wrote an excellent moral tale for her grandson, in which, admonishing him to shun flatterers, she told him that to be invulnerable to slander, “Do no ill, and the bitterest traducer will stand before the world a convicted liar.” She abolished torture on reading the interrogation of Volhynski, a Russian boyar, brought to torture for supposed treason, and in her testament she willed that her descendants should read that piece of conviction to stifle in them any inclination to cruelty.

She was the first to divide the Russian Empire into provinces, and to give each province self-government. She opened the first national schools, cadet-corps, and two splendid half-school, half-convent-like institutions for the education of the daughters of the nobility. She promulgated an ukase allowing landlords to work the mines of gold and silver found on their own properties, which before had been strictly forbidden; and made all the rivers and seas free of access to every one—i.e., every one might sail on them, use them for mills, etc. She tried to encourage weaving, spinning and sewing, science and commerce, and gave permission to all her subjects to travel—then an unknown liberty. It is the boast of Russians that in her reign no beggars were to be found, owing, no doubt,

to her humane laws regarding the serfs. Every landlord was compelled to keep on his estate, and to provide for, every serf, whether the serf were able to work or not. It would, in fact, take too long to enumerate all the numerous acts of clemency, justice, and wisdom of this wise, prudent, and far-seeing empress. If her frailty as a woman calls for the world's censure, no one, on reading her history, can forbear bringing to her feet the tribute she so well deserves as an empress.

In the present translation I have tried to preserve, as far as possible, the quaintness and piquancy of the original Russian, but I fear that in thus endeavouring to produce a faithful copy of the author's work I have often sacrificed elegant and correct English. Only those who know how terse and vigorous a language the Russian is will be able to appreciate the translator's difficulties, which are greater than those of an author of a new work, so far as the mere writing of it is concerned. Whilst it is often impossible to adhere strictly to the author's words without producing obscurities, the use of lengthy phrases and even whole sentences to express the full sense of the original, means, on the other hand, the annihilation of the author's style. As a rule, translators of Russian works, in their endeavour to make their renderings readable, only

succeed in producing a tale in common-place English, with a foreign plot, long drawn out, devoid of colour, and wearisome to read,—barely recognisable sometimes by those who are conversant with the original.

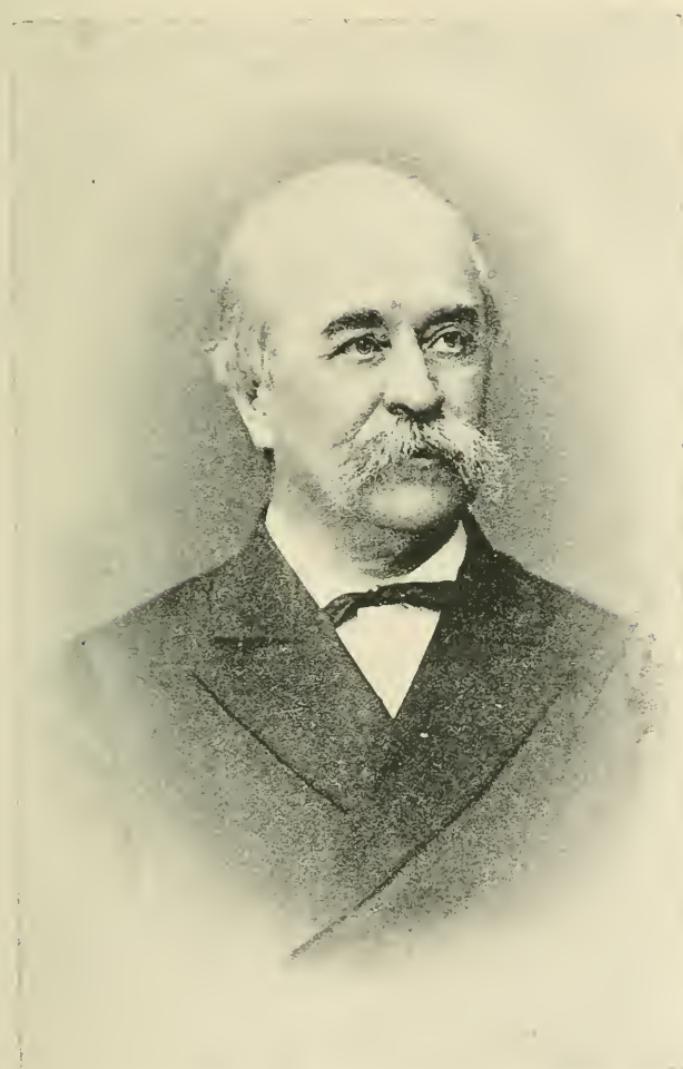
To assist those who are not familiar with Russia and Russian history, I have explained various references in the text by means of footnotes; and to excite a more lively interest in the characters, I have included portraits. The frontispiece is a reproduction of an engraving taken from a celebrated painting which embodies the popular legend concerning the Princess Tarakanova's last hours.¹ The portraits of Orloff and Ekaterina are reproduced from old and rare engravings. Danilevski's likeness is from a photograph taken some years ago.

In conclusion, conscious of many faults and oversights in a translation originally not intended for publication, I have to acknowledge that I am most indebted to Mr. F. Dillon Woon, of Wallington, England, for his kind aid and criticism, and to accord him my best thanks.

IDA DE MOUCHANOFF.

Pskov.

¹ The original painting (by Constantine Flavitski) hangs in the famous private gallery of M. Tretiakoff.



PRINCESS TARAKANOVA.

PART I.

DIARY OF LIEUTENANT KONSOV.

“There can be no doubt she is an adventuress.”

—*Letter of Ekaterina II.*

CHAPTER I.

TEMPEST - TOSS ED.

MAY, 1775: ATLANTIC OCEAN,

Frigate *Northern Eagle*.

A STORM has been raging for already three days. We have been so tossed about that it has been impossible to write. Our frigate, the *Northern Eagle*, is not far from Gibraltar. We have lost our rudder, and our sails are all torn, and now the current is carrying us south-eastwards. Where shall we land? what will become of us?

It is night; the wind has fallen, and the sea is calmer. I am writing in my cabin. All that

I have time to write of what I have seen and undergone, I will place in a bottle, and cast it upon the waters; and you who may chance to find it I entreat, by all that is sacred, to send it to its address. Ah! all-powerful God, grant me powers of memory; enlighten my poor soul, so torn with doubt!

* * * * *

I am a sailor, Pavel Konsov, an officer in the navy of our most gracious Majesty, Empress of all the Russias, Ekaterina II. Five years ago, by the mercy of God, I succeeded in distinguishing myself at the famous battle of Chesma. All the world knows of our brave companions, Lieutenant Elien and Lieutenant Klokachov, who, on the night of the twenty-sixth of June, 1770, with four fire-ships and a few Grecian boats, hastily equipped, bravely advanced upon the Turkish fleet at Chesma, and rendered valuable assistance in its destruction. I, though so insignificant, had the good fortune, under cover of the fire-ships and the dark, to throw with my own hand, from our ship, *January*, the first fire-ball at the enemy. It was this fire-ball which, falling into and igniting the powder magazine, caused the explosion near the ship of the Turkish admiral from which the whole fleet took fire.

Next morning, of over a hundred formidable men-of-war, some of sixty and some of ninety guns, frigates, galliots, and *galères*,—not one remained! On the surface of the waters were visible only wreckage and numbers of dead bodies.

Our victory was sung in odes by the celebrated poet Heraskov, and several lines were dedicated to my humble self, until then unknown to the world. This poem was in every one's mouth. The English in the Russian service—for instance, Mackenzie and Dugdale, who served on one of the fire-ships—took to themselves the credit for the greater part of the glory won at the battle of Chesma. But they did not really much surpass our own officers and men, who all distinguished themselves by their courage and gallantry. After this event I was found worthy of receiving the rank of lieutenant, and the Count Alexis Orloff, the hero of Chesma, having honoured me by his preference, I became his aide-de-camp. My career was thus, so far, very fortunate. Life, on the whole, smiled upon me. But sometimes a fatal destiny pursues man. Suddenly fortune ceased to favour me, angry, maybe, at my abrupt, albeit forced, departure from my native land.

Resting on our laurels reaped at Chesma, we led joyous lives. We received flattering invitations from the French, Spanish, Venetians, and men of other nations. All at once, upon me, the alien, there fell a new, unexpected, and very terrible temptation.

The war continued, but Count Orloff, after many noisy battles, lived in luxurious ease with the fleet. He was wont to say, "I am as happy as Enoch, who was taken up to heaven." But these were mere words, for, since he had taken an active part in placing Ekaterina upon the throne, wild and bold ideas were ever coursing through his brain.

Once, when sailing in the Adriatic with the squadron, he despatched me on a secret mission to the brave, warlike Montenegros. This was in the year 1773. The scouts made all arrangements wisely and adroitly; and at night, taking with me what I required on shore, I landed with great caution, and speedily conducted my business. But on our return voyage we were sighted and pursued by the Turkish coastguards. We succeeded in defending ourselves for a considerable time; but in the end our sailors were all killed, while I, severely wounded in the shoulder, lay unconscious at the bottom of the

boat, where I was found, and whence I was removed, a prisoner, to Stamboul.

I was disguised in a national Albanian costume. Nevertheless, my captors discovered that I belonged to the Russian navy, and, at first, thinking no doubt that they would receive a good ransom for me, paid me great attention. Ah ! thought I, as soon as they find out that their prisoner is no other than Lieutenant Konsov, who threw the first fire-ball which caused the explosion and destruction of their staffship at Chesma, what will my lot be then ?

CHAPTER II.

MY IMPRISONMENT.

My imprisonment lasted for about two years, coming to an end in the year 1775.

At first I was kept shut up in one of the wings of a seven-towered castle, but afterwards I was chained and confined in one of the three hundred mecheti (mosques) of Stamboul. I don't know whether at last, by some means, the Turks learned that one of their prisoners was Konsov, or whether, having lost all hopes of a ransom, they resolved to take advantage of my knowledge and abilities; but this I know, they tried to convert me to Mohammedanism.

The mosque in which I was imprisoned is situated on the shores of the Bosphorus, and through my window-grating I could watch the blue sea and the vessels sailing to and fro. The mulla who came to visit me was of Sclavonic origin; he was a Bulgarian from Gabrova. We therefore understood one another without much

difficulty.¹ My visitor set to work in a round-about way to convert me to the Turkish faith. He praised the Turkish people, their customs and morals, and extolled the power and glory of the Sultan. At first, though very indignant at all this, I kept silence, but at last I began to contradict. Thereupon, in order to gain my confidence in himself and his faith, he obtained as a first step permission for my removal to a more comfortable cell, and for my being provided with better food. Accordingly I was transferred to the ground floor of the mosque, part of which the mulla himself inhabited, and was allowed tobacco and all sorts of sweetmeats and wine. Still, notwithstanding all this, my chains were left on me. My teacher (himself a renegade), according to the law of Mohammed, could not drink wine, but he enticed and tempted me to. "Turn Islamist," he would say, "and then how happy you will be: your chains will at once fall off you. And see how many ships there are: you may enter the Turkish service on one of them, and in time become one of our captains!"

I lay on my mat without touching any of the

¹ The Bulgarian language is similar to the Russian, being a Sclavonic dialect.

tempting viands, and scarcely hearing a word that my tempter said, for my mind was filled with thoughts of my native land. I murmured the names of my friends and of all dear to me, and pondered over my lost happiness. My heart was breaking, my soul was torn with uncertainty and grief. Ah! how well I remember those sad hours, filled with such sorrowful musings!

As I now recollect, my thoughts then wandered to the far-off village, my native Konsovka. I was an orphan, and already had obtained my commission. From the training college I had come straight to the house of my grandmother, whose name was Agraffena Konsova. Not far from us, in the town of Baturin, lived Rakitin, a retired brigadier, a widower, whose estates in the country adjoined ours. Leff Hieracleovitch¹ had one daughter, Irena Lvovna. To tell all briefly, what with going to the church of Rakitin, visiting Irena at her father's halls, and our secret meetings and walks together, we fell in love with one another. My love for Irena was passionate and unrestrained. With her dusky

¹ The Russians have no "Mr.," "Mrs." or "Miss" before names. They use the patronymic, which consists in adding *vitch*, for the masculine, and *vna*, for the feminine, to the name of the father with sometimes a contraction.

skin and luxurious black hair, she was charming. She was my life, my idol, to whom I offered prayers night and day. We confessed our love, and day by day became dearer to each other. Ah! those moments, those meetings, those vows!

We began to send each other love letters, full of passionate avowals of love. I was always fond of music, and Irena used to play enchantingly upon the clavichord, and would sing in a lovely voice pieces from Glück, Bach, and Handel. We met often. In this way the summer passed. Ah! dear and never-to-be-forgotten days!

Unfortunately, one of my letters fell into the hands of Irena's father. Was Rakitin too stern with his daughter, or did he talk her over, and so persuade her to give me up, to change me for another? . . . I know not; it is all too painful for me even to try to remember.

It was autumn, and, as I well recollect, a praznik (holiday); we were preparing for church, when suddenly we heard a carriage drive into our yard. A footman in splendid livery came forward, and placed in my grandmother's hands a packet which he had brought for her. My heart throbbed; my presentiments were fulfilled: Irena's father had sent a firm and decided refusal to my suit.

“MATUSHKA¹ AGRAFFENA VLASSOVNA,—

“Your Pavel Efstafevitch² is worthy in every way, but he is not a fit husband for my daughter; and it is useless for him to send love letters to her. Let him not be offended; we always were and always shall be friends. My earnest hope is that your godson and grandchild may find another bride, a hundred times more suitable than my daughter.”

That letter moved me deeply. The light of heaven seemed extinguished: all that was dearest to me was lost; all my happiness ruined.

Proud, rich, and related to the Razoumovskis, Rakitin mercilessly scorned the poor suitor, who also was of noble blood; yea, of nobler blood perhaps than Rakitin’s own. His pride in his distinguished relatives, who had been favourites of the late empress, had hardened his heart. Often had I heard Irena addressed by her father as the future Fräulein (maid of honour).

“God forgive him!” I repeated, like one who had lost his senses, as I strode up and down the rooms which once I had loved so much, but which

¹ Little mother,—a caressing term.

² Pavel the son of Efstaffi (see note on previous page).

now seemed to me so lonely. The day had been very cloudy, with occasional showers of rain. I ordered my horse to be saddled, and, in my despair, rode off to the steppes. I did not draw rein until I reached the borders of the forest which surrounded the estate of Rakitin. There I wandered through the brushwood like a madman. The wind whistled through the trees and swept over the bare fields. As night came on, I fastened my horse to a tree, and, leaving the forest, made my way through the garden to the window of Irena's room. Ah! what I felt at that moment! I remember, it seemed to me that I had only to call her, and she would throw herself into my arms, and we would go together to the end of the world. Fool that I was! I hoped to see her, to exchange thoughts with her, to pour out my heart, so full of bitter pain. "Leave your father! leave him!" I whispered, gazing in at her window. "He does not pity you; he does not love you." But I pleaded in vain: her window was dark, and nowhere in all the silent house could I hear one word or see one sign of life. On the following night I again went through the garden, and watched the well-known window, through which Irena had often given me her hand or thrown me a letter. Would she not

look out? would she not give me some message? One night, after sending her a note, to which I received no answer, I even determined to kill myself before her window, and took my pistol in my hand.

“But no,” I decided. “Why such a sacrifice? Perhaps Irena has already bartered me for a richer suitor. Wait a little; I may find out who the happy rival is.” Afterwards, but too late, I learned that Rakitin, after writing his refusal of me, had carried his daughter off to a distant property owned by one of his relations, somewhere on the Oka, and was keeping her there in strict confinement.

CHAPTER III.

IMPORTANT NEWS.

My grandmother was not less struck by this than I. One day, about a week later, calling me to her, she said: “ You have guessed who your rival is? One distantly related to the Rakitins; a prince and Kammerherr (gentleman of the chamber). I have found out, Pavelinka, that they sent for him on purpose, and that he was visiting them all the time you were looking for her, and that it was he who helped them to carry her off without leaving any trace. Forget her, *mon ange*, forget Irena; for no doubt she resembles her father in his pride. Console yourself. God will send you a better wife.”

I felt angry and petulant. “ My grandmother is right,” I said; and there and then I determined to strive to forget everything. If Irena had had any heart, she would have found some opportunity of writing me a line and sending it. I remember especially how one night I found amongst some

papers a hymn from "Iphigenia," one of Glück's operas not yet produced in Russia, which I had obtained with great difficulty from an amateur musician for Irena, but which I had been unable to give to her. With tears in my eyes I burnt it. After long days of sorrowful despair, I decided to leave my birthplace. The parting with my grandmother was very touching, for we both felt that we should never meet again.

* * * * *

Agraffena Vlassovna, during her retreat in a neighbouring convent, took cold, and after a short illness, died. I was left alone in the world, like a forgotten blade of grass in a field.

Having left Konsovka, I wandered for some time about Moscow, where I made the acquaintance of Count Orloff. Thence I went to Petersburg, and tried to get some information concerning the Rakitins, who were still living on the Oka. Always hoping to get news of my faithless Irena, I made many inquiries; but no one could tell me what I wanted to know. My furlough was not yet ended; I was free. But what was left in the world for me? What could I do? What could I undertake? Meanwhile, from the south, from over the water, came news that was on every one's lips. It was the beginning of the

Turkish war. A happy idea flashed through my mind. I applied to the Board of Admiralty, and begged to be transferred to the squadron then sailing in Grecian waters. Count Feodor Orloff helped me very much by giving me a letter of introduction to Count Alexis, who was at that time admiral of the fleet in the Mediterranean Sea. How I came there and what I went through, it would be useless to relate. Always repeating the name that once was so dear to me, I threw myself into every danger. I courted death at Spezzia, at Navarino, and at Chesma. "Irisha! Irisha!"¹ what have you done with me! O my God! put an end to my life!" I cried. But death did not come. Instead of being killed, I was taken prisoner soon after the glorious battle of Chesma, and left in dreary captivity in Stamboul!

* * * * *

The mulla who visited me became more and more friendly, but also more and more persistent. We met every day, and had long conversations together. Sometimes he made me very angry, even mad, I might say; but at other times he amused me. Then sometimes I would entice him, for company's sake, to defy the command of the prophet, which, perhaps, a minute before he

¹ Pet name for Irena.

had been teaching me with much fervour, by taking a glass of wine with me ; and would pour the wine out for him myself. My teacher could do nothing, of course, but try to please me, and so very heartily began to partake of the wines of Kioska, and others which he used to bring me. Our meetings continued. We talked sometimes of the Orient, of Russia, and many other things.

One evening—it must have been about the middle of the year 1774—at the time when the Muezzin¹ from the high tower began the call to evening prayer, my teacher, with an air of great mystery, and not without showing some wicked pleasure, asked me whether I knew that there had appeared in Italy a very powerful aspirant to the Russian crown, a dangerous rival to the then reigning Empress Ekaterina. I was very much astonished at the news, and for some time was unable to speak. The mulla again related his story, and on my asking who the impostor was he answered, “A secret daughter of the late Empress Elizabeth Petrowna.” “That is all nonsense and stupid gossip of your bazaars !”—The mulla was much offended ; his eyes sparkled with passion. “No, not gossip,” he exclaimed,

¹ The man who cries the hour for prayer from one of the mosque towers.

as he took from under his robe a crumpled piece of one of the newspapers of Utrecht. "You had best be thinking of what awaits your native land."

My heart, which was beating so loyally for the great empress then ruling over us, suddenly sank. I read the newspaper, and became convinced that the mulla was right. In Paris first, then in Germany, and afterwards in Venice, a person had appeared calling herself "Elizabeth, Princess of all the Russias." At the time of writing, this adventuress was preparing to go to the Sultan, to ask him to aid her with an army then encamped on the banks of the Danube in enforcing her claims. The mulla remained with me a little longer, and then went out, casting a side glance at me as he left the room. The news which I had just heard troubled me very much. "How so?" thought I. "Is it not enough that fate sent us the horrible insurrection of Pougachoff?" of which I heard in my prison, "and then the Turks? Are we now to be troubled with this pretender? The former burnt and desolated the whole Po-Volga;¹ this one wants to disturb the whole of the south." I was quite beside myself, and strode from corner to corner of my cell. In my

¹ The banks on either side of the Volga.

anger, I went up to my window, seized hold of the grating, and shook it with all my might. I was ready to tear it with my teeth. "Oh! for wings! for wings!" I cried to God. I would have flown to the fleet, told them everything, and warned Orloff, who was so devoted to the empress. . . . My prayers were answered in a most marvellous manner. Never shall I forget it, though I live for a century.

Devising a hundred plans for escape, my first idea was to prepare some kind of key to loosen my chains. On an earthenware pot I succeeded in sharpening part of an old nail (upon which I used to hang my clothes, and which I had taken from the wall), and, after much painstaking, fashioned it into a key. It is impossible to describe my joy when, for the first night, I took off my chains and went to bed without them. Next morning I again fettered myself, and carefully hid the key in a crevice in the wall. My plan was this:—after having very quickly loosened my chains, I would kill the renegade mulla with them, and run away from the prison without being seen. But where? Thus I planned; but God, who holds our hearts in His hand, delivered me from this sin. The mulla continued to visit me and to drink the wine, which through

his intercession had been provided for me in abundance. At last my chance came. Having chosen an evening, I decided upon telling the mulla that, convinced by his wise teaching, I had resolved to embrace the Mohammedan faith. He was transported with delight, and in his joy partook so heartily of the wine as to become intoxicated and begin to doze. I kept refilling his glass. "No," he repeated continually, "I cannot. I shall miss the prayers; I shall be denounced." But I again filled the glass, and he, blinking at me knowingly, again emptied it, threw himself on the floor, and beginning to hum a Bulgarian song, was soon fast asleep. We were both about the same height; my beard, which during my imprisonment had grown very long, only differed from his by being of a slightly lighter colour.

"Oh! good God! is it possible," thought I, with a thrill of joy, "that this is liberty at last?"

Drawing the enormous white turban over my eyes, I devoutly bowed my head, and with silent footsteps and the rosary in my hand, as if repeating a prayer, I slowly left the prison, and crossed the courtyard. The sentinels at the porches and the gates of the mosque were walking silently backwards and forwards with their muskets; but as they did not recognise me I escaped detention.

For some time the noise of the street confused me ; I quite lost my senses. But I quickly recovered myself, and hastening my steps, soon reached the sea-shore. I signalled to one of the boatmen, took my place in the first little boat that approached me, and, bowing still lower, motioned to the boatman to row me to one of the nearest ships. It was a foreign one, as I had already remarked from my windows. I saw now that it was a French schooner, quite ready to sail, as I could tell by her flag.

CHAPTER IV.

I SEE THE PRINCESS.

A DARK, handsome, spirited Frenchman, the commanding officer of the schooner, soon showed me that he was a worthy subject of the nation to which he belonged. Seeing in me a Russian sailor, he looked at me, was silent a moment, and then whispered, “Are you Konsov?”

“What makes you think so?” I asked, not without some trepidation.

“Oh! how glad I should be if it were so!” he answered, “for we all pity brave Konsov very much, and constantly ask after him. I should be very happy to be of any service to him.”

There was nothing to be done; and I concluded it was better to reveal myself. The captain was overjoyed; he conducted me to his own cabin, and at once promised to pay the boatman; whom, however, for safety’s sake, he first ordered to be hoisted on deck with the boat. The sails were then unfurled, and the anchor

weighed. It was night when the schooner set sail, and by morning we had left Stamboul far behind us. The mulla must have slept soundly and long, for we were not pursued. My boatman, who was sent back from one of the villages we passed, having received all that had been promised him, and the mulla's clothes in which I had escaped into the bargain, was only too glad to hold his tongue. The French officers gave me proper clothing, and generously furnished me with a sum of money, to which all had subscribed. They politely offered to put me on board the first Russian vessel we should meet in the Italian seas.

Meanwhile, I heard from the captain that the mysterious Russian Princess was no longer in Venice, but was now at Ragusa, past which town we should have to sail. I asked to be put on shore, but the French officers did all they could to dissuade me, pointing out the risk I should run in being again so near the Turks. This counsel had no effect on me; I insisted on landing.

After having thanked my generous preservers (who even refused to take my signature for their loan), I soon set foot on the shores of the republic of Ragusa, where I obtained information concerning the lady who so deeply interested me.

This mysterious Princess had already conquered the hearts of half the inhabitants of the town. Much talk was going on. I found a great many Poles and persons of different nationalities at the hotel I had chosen, who formed part of the Princess's retinue. All these personages fought shy of me at first, and showed great distrust, but on learning who I was, and that, in my joy at my miraculous preservation, I wished to go immediately on board the squadron of Count Orloff, they ceased to fear me, and without reserve began to tell me all about the Princess. They even offered to procure me an audience, if I wished it. "But who is she? and where has she lived until now?" I asked some of her followers.

"She is the daughter of your late Empress Elizabeth, by a secret marriage with Count Razoumovski," was the answer. "In her childhood she was carried to the frontiers of Persia, and has since, under different assumed names, lived at Kiel, Berlin, London, and many other places. In Paris she was Dame D'Azov, and in Germany and here in Ragusa she bears the title of the Countess of Pinneberg. German princes and others have wooed her, the French Court assigned her apartments at their consul's, and were quite ready to give her aid and protection."

All this troubled me greatly. "Kiel! Berlin!" thought I. "Kiel is in Holstein. It played a most important part in the history of Anna and Elizabeth, the daughters of Peter the Great. Is it possible that in Petersburg no importance is attached to all this? What will be done when all is known about this aspirant to the throne?"

The Poles then offered to take me to be presented to the Countess of Pinneberg. I dressed myself, trimmed my moustache and beard properly, and powdered, perfumed, and curled my hair. I met with every attention at the house of the Countess. The Hofmarshall, Baron Korf, led me into the reception room. I looked about me, and noticed that the walls were tapestried with blue silk brocade, and that the furniture was upholstered in pink satin. All at once I heard steps and a gay voice.

The Princess Elizabeth entered the room, surrounded by a brilliant retinue. I learned afterwards who these were. Her very devoted friend, the celebrated Prince Radzivill, in a blue velvet *kaftan*¹ literally blazing with diamonds; near him his sister, the beautiful Countess of Moravia, and the Princess Sangoushko. After these came Count Pototski, in a beautiful red

¹ A Persian garment worn by Russian men.

kountouska,¹ all embroidered with gold. The count was then at the head of the Polish confederation, our enemy. Next came the proud and rich Starosta Pinski, Count Prgezdetski, and near him stood the influential young confederate, the famous duellist, Charnomski, with several of Radzivill's officers. Pototski and Prgezdetski wore ribbons and stars. I noticed that the Princess was dressed in an amazon of yellow silk, with gold embroidery, and that it was covered with black gauze; that she wore a small white hat with black ostrich feathers, and a pink mantle trimmed with blonde, and that at her belt were a pair of very small pistolettes of magnificent workmanship. She held a riding-whip in her hand, for she was just going to start for a ride on horseback. The proud Polish magnates addressed the Princess as "Altesse," and when she sat down, remained standing; and in answering her questions bowed so low that they almost seemed to be kneeling.

I must confess that the Princess greatly impressed me. I saw before me a beauty of the first order, between twenty-three and twenty-four years of age, taller than the generality of people, graceful, slender, with lovely auburn

¹ A Polish garment.

hair, a very fair skin, beautiful pink cheeks, and a few freckles, which rather suited her style of beauty. Her eyes were hazel, very large and open; one of them rather squinted, and thus gave her an arch and playful look. But, what was far more important, as a child, and later on as a youth, I had often looked upon the portraits of the late Empress Elizabeth; and now on examining the Princess closely I was struck by the likeness to them.

The Princess noticed my confusion with evident pleasure. Saying a few gracious words to me in French, she gave me her hand to kiss, and having received me with all the ceremony etiquette exacted, with a look dismissed her retinue, and motioned me to a chair. We were alone.

CHAPTER V.

MY INTERVIEW WITH THE PRINCESS.

AFTER having exchanged a few phrases—we spoke French, but I noticed that the Princess let fall many Italian exclamations—we both fell into a most awkward silence.

“ You are a Russian officer—a sailor ? ” asked the Princess.

“ Just so—Your—Serene Highness,” I answered, hesitating a little, not knowing how to address her.

“ I know that you have highly distinguished yourself. Your name made a noise in the world after Chesma,” she continued ; “ and to crown all, you have suffered a long imprisonment.”

I was greatly agitated, and remained silent ; she also paused. At last she began again, and even though so many years have elapsed, I seem to hear that low, charming contralto voice of hers,—

“ Listen,”—said she. “ I am a Russian princess,

the daughter of your once beloved empress. It is true, is it not, that my mother, the daughter of Peter the Great, was much loved? I, both by blood and by her testament, am her only heiress."

"Yes. But you know," I at last ventured to say, "that there now reigns the no less beloved Empress Ekaterina the Great."

"I know, I know," interrupted the Princess, "how all powerful and idolized by her people the present empress is; and it is not for me—poor, weak, and abandoned by all, torn from the Imperial house, and from the land of my birth—to try to dispute the throne with her. I am the most devoted of her slaves."

"Then what are you seeking? what are you expecting?" I asked with astonishment.

"Protection, and that my rights may be respected."

"Excuse me," I returned; "but you must first prove your birth and your rights."

"I have the proofs here," the Princess replied; and, hastily rising, she opened the drawer of a Buhl side-table, with silver incrustations. "Here is the testament of my grandfather, Peter I., and this one is my mother's, Elizabeth's."

The Princess tendered me a French version

of the papers mentioned. I looked them over hastily.

“But these are only copies,” said I; “mere translations.”

“Oh, yes; but make your mind easy: the originals are in safe hands. . . . How would it be possible to carry such important documents about with me; the risk would be too great,” answered the Princess, turning her head a little from me. Then she moved to the other side of the room, where, in heavy gilt frames, hung two oil paintings: one a remarkably good copy of the portrait of the late Empress Elizabeth Petrowna, with a small crown upon her head; the other that of the Princess now standing before me.

“Do you see the likeness?” she said, looking at me.

“Well, yes, there is a likeness. I noticed it as soon as I came in,” I answered. “Allow me to ask how long ago that portrait was taken?”

“This very year, at Venice. . . . The celebrated Piacetti painted my intended bridegroom’s portrait, the Prince Radzivill’s, and begged to be allowed to paint mine at the same time.”

“Mysterious coincidence!” I exclaimed, with uncontrollable agitation; “we see things past all

imagining. The dead rise out of their graves. There beyond the Volga the Emperor Peter III., buried in the face of all the nation ;¹ here, unexpected, undivined, the daughter of the Empress Elizabeth.”

“ Do not, if you please, confound me with Pougachoff,” answered the Princess, slightly reddening ; “ although he gives himself out as the Emperor, coins his money with the legend *Redivivus et Ultor* (the risen Avenger), still, as yet, he is only my lord-lieutenant in that part of the country.”

“ How so ? ” I answered, quite astonished. “ Then you also confess that he is an impostor ? ”

“ Do not ask who he is,” mysteriously answered the Princess ; “ afterwards you shall learn all ; the time has not yet come. He has already conquered many towns—Kasan, Orenburg, Saratov—and all the shores of the Volga. I know nothing of his past. Let God be his judge ; but I—I

¹ Seven days after the accession to the throne of Ekaterina II. her husband, Peter III., died, it is supposed, a violent death. Some time after a simple Cossack, named Pougachoff, an escaped convict from the mines of Siberia (whose torn nostrils showed that his crime had been murder), succeeded in raising the whole of the Urals (such was the credulity of Russians at that time) by giving himself out as Peter III.

am really and truly the daughter of the Empress Elizabeth, and cousin to the Emperor Peter III."

"But who was your father?" I ventured to ask.

"Is it possible that you do not guess?" she answered, slightly frowning. "Alexis Razoumovski, who was married secretly to my mother. My childhood I passed travelling from one place to another; but it is quite indistinct even to me. I remember a retired little village in the South of Russia, from which I was carried off. They would, if they could, have effaced from my mind every remembrance of the past; and to that end they lavished money upon me and took me about from place to place. Count Shouvaloff, apparently, was acquainted with the circumstances. Not long ago, when travelling in Europe, he expressed the wish to see me, and we met secretly."

"What! you saw the Count Shouvaloff? Where?" I exclaimed, amazed, as I recollect ed that not a few people looked upon him as her father.

"I met him at the waters of Spa. . . . Friends warned me of that celebrated Russian traveller, but I could not refuse him. I found him to be an elderly person, rather stout, and bearing traces

of no common beauty. His dress was most costly. He came to me under an assumed name, and when speaking with me sorrowfully fixed his eyes upon me and attentively examined my features. I could see he was very agitated. I learned afterwards that he was my late mother's favourite, Ivan Shouvaloff. I really cannot tell why he looked so moved. It is not for me, of course,—as you may well understand,—to say. That secret my mother took to her grave, with many others."

The Princess was silent ; I also.

" Whose protection, whose help, do you seek ? " I at last ventured to ask, troubled with so many impressions.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRINCESS ASKS ME TO ASSIST HER.

THE Princess locked the paper in a casket, put it away, took up a fan, and again sitting down, began looking out of the window.

“Are you willing to help me?” she asked very seriously, instead of answering my question.

I knew not what to answer.

“Are you willing to give me, should I need it, every help in your power?”

“But what sort of help?”

“Well now, you see, should the Empress Ekaterina be willing to act conscientiously and without strife peacefully to divide the empire with me,”—the Princess uttered this very slowly and distinctly,—“I am ready to agree to anything in reason. I will give up to her the north, with Petersburg, all the Baltic provinces, and all the province of Moscow. I shall retain for myself the Caucasus—practically all the south—oh! I love the south—and part of the west.

Oh ! be quite sure I shall respect a peaceful division. I shall be quite satisfied with the arrangement. I shall people my dominions ; I shall arrange all in my own Fatherland. You will see I am a *masteritsa*.¹ First of all, of course, I shall arrange matters in Oukraine and Poland. Of course you are from Oukraine ? ” she asked me suddenly, fixing her eyes on me ; “ and I passed my childhood there. In case Ekaterina should not agree,” continued she, frowning, “ of course, nothing remains for me but to try the force of arms. I intend going to Constantinople, to the Sultan. He expects me. I shall lead his army on to the Balkans, and on the borders of the Danube shall meet the army of Ekaterina. Then I will have my revenge. I shall find enough people willing to help me ; all the discontented—for instance, the commodore of the fleet,—Orloff ! Eh ! what do you say to that ? ”

“ Orloff ! ” I repeated in amazement.

“ Of course ; he himself. You are astonished, eh ? ” answered the Princess, fanning herself and looking me boldly in the face. “ Yes ; what do you say to that ? ”

“ Excuse me, Your Grace, but I cannot help

¹ *Lit.* “ mistress-woman,” *i.e.*, a clever manager, one quite capable of conducting her affairs.

speaking out my earnest conviction that all this is but a child's dream. On what do you found your hopes of such—excuse me the expression—such treason from the count?"

"Treason!"—cried out the Princess, suddenly reddening; "but, of course, you must be excused. You were so long a prisoner, there is a great deal for you to learn"; and she contemptuously smiled, nervously playing with her fan. "The power and the influence of the Orloffs have greatly fallen; their sworn and hidden foes, the Pânnins,¹ are now in the ascendancy. The empress's favourite, Gregory Orloff, allow me to tell you, has been already replaced by another; he, in his anger, broke off the negotiations begun with the Sultan, and flew from the banks of the Danube to Petersburg. But he was not received at court, but exiled to Revel. Ah! you are astonished. Well, learn still further. Your chief, Count Alexis Orloff, his feelings as a brother insulted, no longer hides his opinions: he is ripe for revenge; and there is no doubt, of course, that he can be very useful to me. You see, what news! I have already sent a letter to the Count Alexis, and a short manifesto."

¹ The Pânnins were, and are, a celebrated noble family holding various court appointments.

“A manifesto! but what about?”

“If Orloff decides on taking my part, I advise him then to proclaim my manifesto to the fleet, take me on board, and stand up for my rights.”

“But that is impossible. Excuse me,” I tried to answer; “your actions are bold, but you have not reflected enough.”

“Why do you think so?” asked the Princess, astonished. “The malcontents are seeking revenge, the forgotten recompense for their well-known services. To Orloff alone—and that every one knows—to him alone Ekaterina owes her throne.”

The Princess rose, walked up and down the room, and at last threw the window open. She was nearly stifled. She began again explaining her plan in its smallest details: how she hoped, with the aid of the fleet, to invade Russia. She would listen to none of my arguments. It seemed as if nothing could convince her. It was plainly visible that this capricious, spoiled, self-willed woman, whose feelings burst forth like lava hidden under ashes, thought she could measure her strength with the most desperate of men.

“You doubt; you are astonished,” she ex-

claimed, with a nervous tremor. “ You ask why I believe in the success of my enterprise? Is it possible that you do not know? . . . Already many of your countrymen side with me; I am in correspondence with numbers of them. . . . But you—are the first Russian, the first really worthy man, that I see throwing in your lot with me. . . . I shall never forget the fact; it is specially dear to me. . . . Believe me, I shall rise victorious out of every difficulty; the darkness *will* clear away. . . . Is it possible that you do not know that Russia is torn asunder by her battles, the pressgang for the recruits, the fires, the plagues? Is it possible you do not know that the country is worn out with her taxations, that on the borders of the Volga there rages a terrible, bloody insurrection? Your army is badly clothed, and still worse fed; . . . all are discontented, all grumble. . . . You are not going to tell me that you, a lieutenant in the Russian navy, know nothing of all this? Yes, all the nation will hail me with delight; the army will meet with joy a Russian-born princess, Elizabeth II., just as they once met Ekaterina.”

I was indignant at her childish and blind confidence in herself.

“ Well, let it be so. Do you speak Russian ? ” I decided on asking her.

The Princess blushed. “ I do not speak it. I have, of course, forgotten it, unfortunately,” she answered, coughing. “ In my infancy, when but three years old, I was taken from Oukraine to Siberia, where they nearly poisoned me ; from there into Persia, where I was placed with an old woman in Ispahan, who took me to live in Bagdad, where a certain M. Fournier taught me French. . . . So it would have been rather strange if I did remember my own language.”

I still continued sitting, my eyes fixed on the ground. I could not raise them to her face.

“ And Dimitri Tzarevitch,¹ whom all Moscow met so joyfully, did he speak Russian ? ” asked the Princess contemptuously. “ Besides, what

¹ Dimitri Tzarevitch was the son of Ivan the Terrible, the last of the house of Ruric, and was said to have been killed at the age of nine at Ouglitch. He of whom the Princess speaks was a pretender, a runaway novice, so it is said. But historians differ as to this. Some say that when Boris Godounoff (the Russian Oliver Cromwell) planned to kill Dimitri, some faithful friends hid the Tzarevitch, and sent him to the Polish Court, where he was brought up, and that afterwards he came into Russia with many adherents and an army of several thousands, the majority of whom were Poles. He reigned less than a year, being killed during an insurrection, 1595-96.

can languages prove? Children learn and unlearn everything so easily."

"Dimitri spoke with a 'Little Russian' accent," answered I. "And then, after all, he was but—a pretender!"

"Gran Dio!" she exclaimed; and again coughing, the Princess laughed. "And you're not ashamed of repeating those idle tales? Listen to me, and remember my words." . . .

The Princess threw herself back in her chair. Bright spots appeared in her cheeks.

"Dimitri was the real tzarevitch." She said this in a voice of conviction. "Yes, the real tzarevitch. He was saved from the hands of the assassin Godounoff by the cleverness of those around him, almost by a miracle, just as I was saved from the poison they gave me in Siberia. Ah! you did not know that? Yes, think about it all a little more. Oh! Signor Konsov, tell your tales to some one else, but not to me, who have studied in a strange land the genealogy of our house. The Shah of Persia offered his hand and his throne to me, but I refused him; he is the eternal enemy of Russia. . . . I *shall* be acknowledged. Do you hear? They *must* acknowledge me," said the Princess, with great dignity.

Striking her knee with her fan, and beginning again to cough, she continued,—

“ I believe in the star of my destiny, and therefore I choose you as my ambassador to Count Orloff. I do not exact a speedy answer. Think over it, weigh well my words, and then give me your decision. You, again I repeat, are the first Russian in an honourable military position whom I have met abroad. You also have suffered, and also escaped from prison by a miracle. Who knows? perhaps Heaven saved you, like many others, and sent you to me.”

Having said this, the Princess rose, and, with a most majestic salute, signified that the audience was concluded.

CHAPTER VII.

I CONVEY A LETTER.

“WHAT does it all mean? Who is she? What is she? A pretender, or a Russian grand duchess?” thought I, as, full of contending thoughts, I left the room of the Princess, and with faltering steps passed between the persons of her suite, who saluted me right and left with the greatest respect.

At the *perron*¹ I noticed several carriage-horses, adorned with velvet and feathers. On entering the hotel I heard the clattering of horses’ hoofs. Going to the window, I saw the Princess, surrounded by her courtiers, riding fearlessly on a beautiful white horse. The cavalcade flew by on the road to Ragusa.

For several days I could not get rid of the most agitating ideas. I hardly left my room, walking backwards and forwards, then lying down, then writing letters, only, however, to tear them up again, and constantly thinking, “How could

¹ Steps before a house.

I, remembering the oath of allegiance which I had taken on entering the service? What ought I to do regarding the proposition of this mysterious Princess?"

One day her secretary, Charnomski, came to pay me a visit. He was a smart, elegantly-dressed man of about forty. He had once been very rich, had been a duellist and a Lovelace, had lost all his fortune at cards and in the affairs of the Confederation. He had not lost his fine manners, but was very conceited and insinuating, and—so rumour said—was serving the Princess because he was deeply in love with her. The conversation turned on the Princess. He was eloquent on the subject of her generosity, her fearlessness, and, having assured me on oath that all she had said of her past life was true, again renewed, in her name, an entreaty that I would side with her.

"But whose daughter is she? who was her father?" I asked, rather drily. "You only speak in her favour, but there must be proofs. Everything is so very doubtful." . . .

Charnomski reddened, and was silent several minutes.

It seemed to me at that time that this Princess's Ganymede curled and pomatumed in

the last fashion, with his diamond ear-rings, was rouged.

“Good heavens! what doubts! Her father—do you not know it yourself?—was the Count Alexis Razoumovski,” said this wily diplomatist, regaining his composure. “But if you desire it, sir lieutenant, I can give you all the details. You see, the Empress Elizabeth, after her secret marriage with the count, had several children——”

“Oh! all that’s nonsense; no one really knows anything about it,” I answered.

“Of course it was a rather delicate affair, and was kept a great secret,” continued Charnomski. “You are right, how should every one know? But I relate all this because I have it from a true source. What became of the other children, and whether any are still living, . . . is not known.

“The Princess Elizabeth, when a child of two years old, was brought to the relations of Razoumovski, the Cossacks Daragan, to their property in Oukraine, Daraganovka, which the neighbours, countrymen of the new *parvenus*, styled, in their own fashion, “Tarakanovka.” The Dowager Empress Elizabeth, and after her all the court, in fun called the child the Princess Tmoutara-

kanova.¹ At first she was not neglected. She was often inquired after. Everything that she needed was always sent to her. But afterwards, especially during her travels, she was lost sight of, and finally quite forgotten.”

The word “Tarakanovka” made me shudder in spite of myself. It sounded to me like a voice of the past. It reminded me of my far-off childhood, of our own little manor, Konsovka, and my late grandmother, Agraffena Vlassovna, who had known much of the past and present court ; of the wonderful luck which had fallen to the lot of the shepherd of Lemechevski, who unexpectedly had become, instead of the singer, Aloski Razouma,² a count, and the privately married husband of the empress ; of the accession to the throne of the new empress ; of the attempt of Merovitch, and of many other events. Through him my grand-

¹ “Tarakanova” and “Tarakanovka” have the same meaning, and apply equally to persons and property, but the latter, being the more playful term, is used for a child. “Tmoutarakanova,” or “Tmoutarakanovka,” was a pet name. It is the name of a town opposite Kertch, and of a Prince whose capital it was. *Tarakan* means “cockroach.”

² Aloski was a native of Oukraine, but was brought thence to sing in the choir of the Imperial chapel. His splendid voice first attracted the attention of the Empress Elizabeth Petrowna. His handsome figure and beautiful face did the rest.

father, Irakli Konsov, who was a neighbour of the Razoumovskis in the village Lemesha, was loaded with favours, rose in his service, and died in a very high position.

I remembered another very hazy circumstance. I went once with my grandmother to a name's-sake day party given by some relations. Our road lay across a village near Baturin, the residence of the Hetman¹ Kiryl Razoumovski. It was a lovely and calm summer's evening, and we were talking together, grandmother and I. From the open carriage, on both sides of the road, in the twilight we could see the weeping willows, and, scattered here and there between them, the white cottages and windmills, and above the willows and the cottages the church steeple. My grandmother, musing quietly, crossed herself, and then thoughtfully, gently, as if to herself, all at once pronounced the word "Tarakanchic."²

"What did you say, grandmother?" I asked.

"Tarakanchic."

"What is that?"

¹ The title given to the chief over all the Cossacks in Little Russia.

² A pet name. Nearly all family names admit of this suffix. The Russians have any number of pet names and diminutives. "Aloshki" (p. 44), for instance, is the diminutive for Alexis.

“Well, I will tell you, *mon ange*,” she answered. “Here, a long time ago, in this same village, lived a mysterious person—a lovely, graceful, and fair child, as fair as a lily; but she did not stay long, and where she disappeared to no one knows.”

“But who was it?” asked I.

“Red Riding Hood,” answered my grandmother, lowering her voice. “I suppose, as in the fairy tale, the cruel wolves have eaten poor Tmoutarakanovka.”¹

My grandmother after this spoke no more, and I, believing the wolves had really eaten the child, forbore to ask any more questions.

But now I clearly remembered that lovely green and willowy Tarakanovka and the mysterious tale of my grandmother. That century was rich in fairy-like lore, and one might be pardoned for believing in all sorts of miracles.

“Well, have you decided, sir?” broke in Charnomski, seeing that, lost in thought, I was silent.

“Explain to me just what the Princess expects of me.”

“Only one thing, sir lieutenant, only one thing,” answered the wily envoy, getting up and

¹ The Russian version of this nursery tale is rather different to the English.

bowing. “To take this letter of the Princess to Count Orloff ; that is the only thing she asks of you. . . . Tell the count how and where you met the Russian Grand Duchess Elizabeth, and with what impatience she awaits his answer to her first letter and manifesto. On the result of your mission depends her further course of action and her departure for the Sultan’s court.

Charnomski took from his breast pocket a letter, and handed it to me.

“That is her only request,” he repeated, bowing again, and insinuatingly looking me in the face, with a half-look of entreaty in his large grey eyes.

After having thought it all over, I felt that I ought not to refuse, and I took the letter. My duty as an officer demanded that I should let the count know everything. He must decide what should be done ; that would be his affair.

“Very well,” answered I. “I do not know who your Princess is, but I undertake to deliver her letter in safety.”

Having waited some time, I found an opportunity of sailing to my destination. I presented myself once more to the Princess, made my adieux, and left Ragusa. The very same day the Prince Radzivill gave, in honour of the

Princess, his fairy-like and long-renowned fête. For a long time in Europe the newspapers could talk of nothing else. The extravagant and generous prince, madly in love with the Princess, had already been lavishing his wealth upon her, like an Indian nabob ; but this time he surpassed himself. The fête lasted a long time ; the most precious wines flowed like water. There was music, cannon were fired in the gardens, and a beautiful display of fireworks of more than 1,000 rockets astonished all the town. At the end of the feast, the knightly lover suddenly announced that the dances would continue till the morning, and that at dawn all the revellers, to refresh themselves, should see a real winter, and should drive home, not in carriages, but in sleighs. On the morrow, when the guests came out on the *perron*, the neighbouring streets were really quite white, and to all appearance covered with snow. During the night busy workers had spread a thick layer of salt over everything, and the joyous, noisy crowd of *masques*, amidst repeated salutes of cannon and the shouts of the newly-awakened citizens, were really driven home to the musical sound of the sleigh bells.

I took my departure for Italy, puzzling my brain with various questions. “ Was this

Princess really the daughter of the Empress Elizabeth? Did she believe in the truth of what she said herself, or did she spread these rumours on purpose?" As far as I could remember the expression of her face, there appeared from time to time, especially in her eyes, something it seemed to me almost impossible to catch—a look of indecision, mingled with a gleam of hope.

In taking with me her letter and the particulars I had learnt, I was prompted by feelings of duty, as an officer of Her Majesty Ekaterina, but I was half won over by pity for the Princess as a lovely and helpless woman.

CHAPTER VIII.

I DELIVER A LETTER.

I LANDED at Ancona. From there I started for Bologna, which I had heard the commander had chosen for his headquarters. The Count Alexis Orloff, although the hero of Chesma, hated the sea from the bottom of his heart, and having given over the command of the squadron to his vice-admiral, the first flag-officer, Vice-Admiral Samuel Greig, he spent most of his time on land.

To those beneath him he was ever amiable and good. He was very fond of simple jokes, and surrounded as he was by almost Imperial luxury, was always attentive and easy of access. The life of the count at Moscow, before the campaign in the Greek waters, which had covered his name with glory, had remained graven on my mind. The Orloffs were no strangers to our family. My late father in days gone by had been their companion-in-arms, and I, in going backwards and forwards from the naval schools to my birth-place, used very often to spend long holidays in their Muscovite house. The Count Alexis

especially was a favourite of bright Moscow; the gigantic and splendid figure of Count Alexana, as all Moscow called him, full of robust health, his fine Grecian eyes, his gay and careless manners, his enormous wealth, all tended to attract to his hospitable halls all that Moscow could boast of as regards aristocracy, nobility, and also almost all other classes.

The house of the Count Alexis, as I well remember it now, stood not far from the gates of Moscow, and not far from the "Crimean Ford," and very near to his property in the environs of Moscow, the village Niaskouchnovo (the "not gloomy" village).

The Muscovites could admire in the house of the count the splendid gobelin tapestries on the walls; the marvellous, graceful Dutch-tile stoves on gilt pedestals; the magnificent collection of old arms and armour. His town garden was ornamented with ponds, lakes, arbours, cascades, a menagerie, and an aviary. At the princely gates, in one of the windows of the lodge-keeper's cottage, hung a golden cage with a parrot in it, who would scream at the idlers, "Long live our little Mother Empress!" At the fabulous feasts of the Count Alexis, very often under the costly lemon and orange trees, brought from his

hothouses, tables would be spread, at which more than 300 people would sit down. A true Russian at heart, the count used to like giving his guests the pleasure of looking on at boxings, wrestlings, minstrelsies, himself often not disdaining to take part in them. With his hand he could bend a horseshoe, tie a poker in a knot, or catch a bull by the horns and throw him down ; and to these sights he would sometimes invite all Moscow.

On one occasion, to have a good laugh at the rising passion of the fops for *pince-nez* and spectacles, on the 1st of May he sent on the public promenade at Sokolnika one of his attendants, dressed in a riding costume, and leading amongst the crowd of young dandies a poor, crippled, and half-blind cur, with great *tin* spectacles on his nose, and a card hung round his neck with the following sentence in large letters, “And look, he’s only three years old ! ”

But it was his splendidly arranged hunting meets and horse races which made him a centre of attraction to all classes of society. Not one horse in all Moscow could be compared to his “Rissak,”¹ a mixed breed of Arabian, English,

¹ To this day this breed remains unrivalled, and it is called, after the Count, “Orlovski Rissak.”

and Frisian horses. At the races held in front of the house at the "Crimean Ford" I can even now remember how the Count Alexano, in the winter in his tiny sleighs, and in summer in his racing *droskies* would lead with his own hands his spotlessly white horse "Smitanka," or her rival, the dapple-grey "Amazonka." Crowds would be running after the count when he, gathering the reins in his hand in his *romanovski touloup*,¹ or his damask coat, would appear at the gates on his snorting, white-maned beauty, calling out to his three Simeons—to his first jockey, Sainka the White, to arrange the bit; to his second, Sainka the Black, to tighten the stirrups; to his third, Sainka the Dresdenite, to moisten the horse's mane with *kvas*.

The count was also playful in his correspondence. Who does not know the letter he wrote to his brother Gregory after the celebrated victory of Chesma?

"Sir, my brother, good day! We marched on the enemy, we went up to him, we caught him, we felled him, we broke him, we conquered him, we drowned him, we burnt him, and turned him

¹ A sheepskin coat with the wool inside. The hide is embroidered with gaily-coloured silks, and being peculiarly tanned, is very expensive.

into ashes. And I, your humble servant, am in good health.—ALEXIS ORLOFF.”

Copies of this letter were in the hands of every one. A born jester, a reveller, a boxer, this pleasure-loving count in his young years before the war had never even dreamt of being a sailor. Even to take the command of the fleet in Italy he went by land! He was very much talked about on the accession of the empress to the throne; after the battle of Chesma he was still more talked about; but to a good many he remained an enigma. At the reviews and parades, at his own princely *levées*, Count Alexis always appeared surrounded with great pomp, covered with gold, diamonds, and orders of all sorts; but in his walks in Paris he would go out amongst the elegant and fastidious crowd of promenaders sometimes with his head unpowdered, with a little round *bourgeois* hat, and a coat of the coarsest and commonest grey cloth. I, of course, like others, could not very well guess the motives which prompted him to do all this. Very often even his words would bewilder you. Yes, he was a man of great mind and subtle wit. I burned with impatience again to see him, after so long a separation, although the commission entrusted to me by the Prin-

cess troubled me very much. Before my departure from Ragusa I had let the count know by letter of my escape from the Turks, and also that I was bringing him news of a very important person, whom I had discovered by accident and had met.

My journey through Italy lasted a long time. I managed to get a chill on the mountains, fell ill, and was obliged to stay for some time at the house of a charitable magnate. At length I arrived at Bologna. After having rested from my journey a little, I changed my dress, and, feeling rather agitated, I approached the beautiful palace of the count at Bologna. I learnt that the count was at home, and sent to announce my presence. After my long imprisonment, I had every reason to expect a warm welcome and reward; but I was rather doubtful how the count would take my audience and conference with the dangerous and mysterious pretender, held without the permission of my chief. There were two sides to the question. If I had been asked to say conscientiously exactly what I thought of the Princess, I should have found it very difficult to give a truthful answer. At Ragusa I had heard many doubtful things of her past life, about mysterious ties she had formed.

But what did her past life matter to any one? Who knows what ties she might have been induced to make to escape from her gloomy fate? And who knows if such ties really existed?

The count received me directly. I was led through a long suite of richly-decorated drawing-rooms and salons, first on the ground-floor and then upstairs.

At this time the handsome hero of Chesma, Count Alexis, was in his thirty-eighth year. Not only at home, but in a strange land, he loved to spend his time with doves, being passionately fond of these birds. On my arrival he was sitting at the very top of his house, where he ordered the footman at once to bring me. What a sight met my eyes! This celebrated man—so clever, so strong and so stately, before whom all other men seemed but pygmies—was seated on a common wooden chair at the dusty little window. Having run away from the heat, he was seated with only his shirt on! and was drinking out of a mug some iced wine, at the same time waving his handkerchief at a brood of doves, who were pirouetting about the roof. “Ah! Konchic;¹ how are you?” said he, turning for a minute towards me. “Well, what? run away, eh? Well, con-

¹ *Chic.*—A diminutive expressive of endearment.

gratulate you, old fellow. Sit down. Oh! look there; are they not a lovely couple? What do you think of them? Ah! the rascals; there they are turning and twisting. Ah, *tourmelins*¹ ah!"

Again he waved his handkerchief, and I, not finding any chair to sit upon, began looking at him with curiosity.

The count in these last years of peace had grown stouter, his neck was quite like a bull's, his shoulders like Jupiter's or Bacchus's, his face quite striking, with its look of health and dauntlessness.

"Well! what are you staring at?" said he, standing and looking at me. "I was amusing myself with birds, while you were sitting with the Turks. Here they are all clay-coloured and black, but the tuberous ones, like ours, old fellow, are few, and not common. Yes, they can take letters for a longer distance than 100 *versts*. Marvellous! If we could but breed them in Russia! Well now, tell me everything about the prison and about the travels."

I began my narration. The count listened to me at first very inattentively, all the while looking out of the window, but afterwards he grew more

¹ A species of dove, remarkably short-beaked and short-winged. In flying they turn over and over.

interested; and when I touched upon the subject of the person whom I had met at Ragusa, and handed him the letter, the count threw a handful of seed from a plate at the assembled doves, and when they all flew off in a crowd up on the roof, stood up.

“This news, my dear fellow, is such that we must talk seriously. Let’s get down from this mast into the company cabin.” We went down-stairs and afterwards into the garden. The count on the way had dressed himself, and given orders that no one was to be received. We walked a long while backwards and forwards in the avenues. While I answered his questions I looked attentively into the expressive and often dreamy eyes of the count. He listened to me with very great attention.

“Ah! art scheming?” said he, all at once; “why, suppose she is a pretender, an adventuress. Now explain,” added he, sitting down on a bench. “Art repeating the words of others or thine own?”

I felt confused, and did not quite know what to answer.

“All the tales of her past life are so strange,” said I, “so much like a fairy-tale—Siberia, poison, escape from Persia, correspondence with all the

crowned heads of Europe—that I have conscientiously acted as a faithful servant of the empress, looked well about me, as I cannot, I must say, hide my doubts. . . .”

“Agreed,” said the count, “Of course, you can look at it in two ways; but the most important fact is that *she* is known of at St. Petersburg. They have written to me about her, speaking of her as a ‘vagabond,’ who has taken to herself a name and genealogy to which she has no right.”

The count was silent for some time.

“H’m! nice vagabond!” added he, as if to himself. “Puzzling, of course. Let it be so; I do not dispute it. . . . But why have they decided on exacting her extradition? and, in case it should be refused, on taking her by force, even if it is necessary to bombard the citadel of Ragusa? No one acts like that with a common vagabond. Such a person you just catch—a stone on the neck and in the water.”

I felt as if cold water were running down my back at these words of the count. I vividly remember that eventful June day. . . .

“Well, what, old man—you see yourself it’s no vagabond—what do you think about it? No, straight out with it, hide nothing.”

CHAPTER IX.

WE WILL BEFRIEND HER.

THE words of the count filled me with astonishment. Involuntarily I remembered then the intelligence the Princess had given me of the fallen favours of the Orloffs, of the exile of the late favourite to Revel, and of the rising fortunes of their enemies. Was it grief, was it passion which blinded the count? or did he really believe in the descent of the Princess? I really did not know, but I could clearly see that he was not throwing his words to the winds, and that a great struggle was taking place in his heart.

“Excuse my impertinence, Your Grace,” said I impatiently, “but if you bid me, I’ll hide nothing from you. The person I saw, I must say, resembles very much the late Empress Elizabeth. Who does not know the portrait of that empress? The same imposing profile, the white, delicate complexion, the same dark arched eyebrows, the same majestic figure, and, more important than all,—the same eyes. I cannot help

relating to you what my late grandmother in Oukraine told me about the relatives of the Razoumovskis."

"Ah! bah! But yourself, Konsov—you are from Baturin!" excitedly said the count. "Well, well, and what did your grandmother tell you?"

I told him all I knew about Daraganovka, and about the mysterious child who had once lived there.

"Ah! that's where this Tarakanovka comes from," said the count. "True! true! Yes! yes! I remember now I heard something about a Tmoutarakanski¹ princess."

He rose from the bench. I could see that he was very much agitated. Crossing his hands behind his back, and with his head hanging down, he began walking backwards and forwards on the garden path. I respectfully followed him at a little distance.

"Konsov, you are now no longer a boy!" said Alexis Gregorevitch, turning his keen eagle eyes upon me. "This is a most important State affair. Be careful, not only of your actions and your words, but even of your very thoughts. Can you swear to be silent on everything?"

¹ There are a hundred different ways of saying Russian names.

“Your Grace, I give you my oath.”

“Well, then, listen, and—remember—you answer me with your head.”¹

The count stopped, and his thoughtful gaze seemed to pierce my very soul; then he added, “Don’t forget; you know me of old—your head! . . .”

We crossed the garden, and sat on an isolated bench.

“Of course it will not be very difficult to catch this calumniated person,” said the count; “you’re obliged to do a great deal sometimes, when you are ordered to do it. But would it be honest now? What do you think about it?—Mysteriously—deceitfully? Ah! and especially with a woman.—It would be a pity now, wouldn’t it?”

“Of course it would,” answered I, in my simplicity; “of course we must conquer our enemies; but then openly—otherwise everybody will have the right to call us traitors, soul-killers.”

At this minute the eyes of the count twinkled very curiously. He closed them quickly, as though something had blown into them.

“Of course, of course, old man, it would be mean. . . . You and I are not executioners,” said he. “Of course they wouldn’t write from

¹ *i.e.* “If you play me false, you forfeit your head.”

Petersburg for nothing; and then, who knows what they think about us there? But there now, I'll be open. I received two secret envoys from over there, tempting and inducing me to turn traitor. . . . Could I expect such a thing? Isn't it an insult, after all my long years of faithful devotion? Ah! what think you of that?"

The frankness of the count struck me with astonishment, and flattered my vanity. "What a lot falls to the great of this earth!" thought I and from the bottom of my heart I pitied the count, whose fallen greatness I knew already.

Alexis Gregorevitch put several questions to me about the Princess and her *entourage*, told me he would employ me as adjutant, and dismissed me with the order to go to Bologna and await his commands. I thanked him for his attention, and took my leave.

The next day the count left for Livorno¹ to visit his squadron, and remained away a whole week. As I was without any money and in great want of everything, it was not very pleasant for me. I had no one to write to in Russia. Several more days passed. At last I was summoned.

The count received me in his study.

¹ Generally miswritten in English "Leghorn."

“Can you guess, Konsov, what I’ve to tell you?” he asked me, arranging some papers.

“How can I guess the thoughts of Your Grace?”

“Here’s a note. Go to the purser, get some money, pay your debts. Send the money to those French creditors. You’ve ruined yourself in the service. To-morrow you go to Rome.”

I bowed, and awaited further orders.

“Do you know why?” asked the count.

“I cannot guess.”

“Whilst you wandered about and were ill, this mysterious Princess, deserted by the volatile Radzivill,” said the count, “left Ragusa. At first, with a Neapolitan passport, she went to Barletta, lived there some time. Now she has appeared in Rome as a Polish lady. Do you understand?”

I again bowed.

“Well, now,” continued the count, “I am very culpable in her eyes. I have not answered her two letters. But how could I, surrounded by all these spies? Answer? I tried once or twice to send her a faithful emissary, one of your own companions-at-arms, but she would not receive him. I pity that poor, young deserted thing, so inexperienced and without any means. You’ll be able to see her and begin the negotiations. I

have invited her here ; at Rome, I have heard, there are several Russians. Try and get to know everything that's going on ; but, first of all, shield her from all enemies and all foreign influence. Let her believe in us alone. We will befriend her. About your own conscience, be easy ; all shall be done in all mercy and according to the laws of justice.”

CHAPTER X.

IS THE COUNT A TRAITOR?

I WAS overwhelmed ; I was wonderstruck.

“Is it possible the count can be a traitor ?”
The thought flew like lightning through my brain.
Impossible. Celebrated patriot, celebrated hero
of the *Coup d'Etat*,¹ right hand of Ekaterina ?
Such thoughts would be unworthy. But what in
the world is he plotting ? Agitated by different
doubts, suddenly a bold and almost insolent plan
came into my head—that of learning the most
secret designs of the count. It is true that in
these last few days a rumour had been circulated
to the effect that from the north had been received
a secret *ukase*, that the count, for whom the
deepest regret was felt, had been recalled, and
the command of the fleet given to another.

“Excuse me, Your Grace,” said I to the count;
“to-morrow I start for Rome. You have confided
to me a mission of the highest importance. In
case the Princess should agree to your conditions,

¹ That, namely, which placed Ekaterina on the throne.

and should accept your invitation, what will be the result of it all, if I may presume to ask you?"

"Oh! what a fireship!¹ what a leech!" said Alexis Gregorevitch, with a curl of his lip. "Yes, and you sailors are all like that. Take out everything, and spread it on the table. But we diplomâts do not care for useless prattle. Live, and then you'll know. This affair will show itself. But I am the true and faithful servant of our Empress Ekaterina Alexéevna."

"Be generous, and forgive me, count," said I. "You have confided to me, not a naval mission, but a diplomatic one. It has never happened to me before, and therefore I am very doubtful. . . . And should this person assert her rights?"

"Well, that's just what I'm thinking about. It might easily be that she is a branch of the Imperial family. In her veins flows perhaps the blood of our mother Elizabeth. We must be ready for anything. Do all you can, Konsov; your services shall not be forgotten. But don't forget one thing. You must help the Princess with money, as she is a woman. You must take her out of her humiliating position. . . . Who knows?"

¹ *i.e.* "What an impatient, impulsive, hot-headed fellow!" Compare the English idiom, "What a brick!"

perhaps to her Imperial Majesty it will not be disagreeable. Our reigning sovereign has a heart. Oh! sometimes it is a stone. . . . Who knows? perhaps in time it may be softer."

The count astonished me more than ever.

"Well," thought I to myself, "what an honour for me to have won the confidence of such an exalted personage! All is clear now. The count is no traitor. Although his ambition, perhaps, led him to murmur, still.—The favour of the Orloffs is fallen, and it's evident the count wishes to persuade the Princess to give up her rights."

The whole plan, explained to me by the count, became quite clear. Having prepared everything for my journey, I took my departure, with the most faithful resolution to fulfil the mission which had been confided to me.

* * * *

It was in the month of February, 1775, not so very long ago for me to have suffered and experienced so much. Having reached Rome, I made inquiries about the emissary of the count who had reached Rome before me. He was a lieutenant of our own squadron, and, as some said, a Greek. To me it seemed more likely that he, Ivan Moisaevitch Christianok by name,

was half German and half Jew. I handed over to him the papers that had been confided to my care, and began questioning him about our mutual mission. As black as a beetle, small of stature, restless—in fact, a most repulsive man—Christianok smiled continually, spoke always in a most insinuating voice, and seemed, with his shifting glance, to dive at once into one's soul and one's pocket.

I learnt from Christianok that the Princess had taken a few rooms in Rome, on the first floor of the house of Juani, on the Champs de Mars. She lived there in the greatest retirement and in great want. She paid for her apartment fifty *sequins* a month, and kept only three servants. She only went out to go to church, and, excepting one friend, a Jesuit *abbé*, and the doctor who attended her, she saw no one. The emissary of the count, Christianok, disguised as a beggar, lounged about the house of Juani for more than a fortnight, trying in vain to get a glimpse of its fair inhabitant. But he was mistrusted by every one, and, notwithstanding all his efforts, his entreaties to the servants, no one would let him in. He took me to the Champs de Mars.

The house of Juani was very solitary; it was built quite apart, between a yard and a not very

large but very shady garden. I went up to the door and raised the knocker. First I saw at the window, which was framed in creeping vines, the maid of the Princess, daughter of a Prussian captain, Francis Mecèdès, and after her the secretary of the Princess, whom I had seen at Ragusa, Charnomski.

“From whom?” asked the latter timidly, looking at me from behind the half-open door.

I hardly knew him again. Where was his *aplomb*—his foppery? where had it disappeared? His clothes were half worn out, his hair was uncurled, there was no rouge on his cheeks, and he wore only the commonest and cheapest of ear-rings!

“From Count Orloff,” answered I.

“Have you a letter?”

“Yes; but let me in.”

“Have you a letter?” repeated the secretary, already taking an insolent and bragging tone.

“Yes, in the writing of the count himself,” answered I, handing him the letter.

Charnomski tore it out of my hands, glanced at the German superscription, and, quite bewildered, slowly retreated, and disappeared. After a few minutes the door was quickly opened, and I was let in.

“ Ah ! *mille pardons !* ” said Charnomski, bowing very low ; “ now just fancy, I didn’t know you again in your uniform, you are so changed. Welcome, thrice welcome, long-expected and wished-for guest ! ”

He turned and twisted and smirked so much that I could not help at once pitying and laughing at him.

The Princess received me in a very small room, the windows looking out on to the silent and deserted garden. There were now no splendid damask walls, no gilt furniture, no bronze—in one word, not one of the luxuries which there had been at Ragusa. She herself, the Grand-duchess Elizabeth Tarakanova, Princess Wladimirskaya, Dame D’Azow—she who had captivated the Shah of Persia and German princes—was now lying ill on a leather sofa, a blue velvet mantilla thrown over her, and her feet encased in fur slippers. The room was cold and damp. A log of wood was flickering dimly in the fireplace, shedding no warmth anywhere. I did not recognise the Princess. Her thin and wan face, with the hectic flush in each cheek, seemed more lovely than ever. Her eyes smiled, but they were not the same ; they reminded me of the eyes of a beautiful wild fawn, mortally wounded,

escaping the chase, but feeling that her end is near.

“Ah! you are come at last!” said she timidly, smiling. “You have brought the answer to my letter from the count. . . . I have read it. . . . Thank you. . . . What have you to tell me?”

“The count is your most obedient servant,” answered I, repeating the words that had been said to me. “He is quite at your service and at your feet.”

The Princess rose. Arranging her beautiful fair wavy hair, which she wore without powder, she put out her hand with a timid, friendly gesture. I ventured to raise it to my lips.

“Here all, excepting two persons, have deserted me,” said she; but her strong convulsive cough interrupted her. She put a handkerchief to her lips,—“and then, added to that, I fell ill;—but all that’s nonsense,—it’s not worth speaking about. But do you know now that I’m quite without any means? The Prince Radzivill, his friends, the French people who helped me, have all deserted me, have all hidden themselves,—and all that happened so unexpectedly,—so quickly. . . . Hardly was peace signed with Turkey when my *complaisant* Polish magnates one and all threw

me off. Never mind ; I'll pay them out for that some day. But now, . . . I must tell you openly," added she, smiling, "I am quite, yes, *quite*, without money. I have not one single *baioch*—I've nothing to pay the doctor, or to procure provisions, with. My creditors give me no peace : threaten me with the police. It's awful ; I've nothing left to live upon. . . ."

Having said this, the Princess began again to cough most awfully, and fixed upon me her supplicating, bewildered glance ;—of her former confidence not a trace remained.

"Your Highness," said I, fulfilling my instructions, "the count has sent you this small sum. How much there is here I know not, but the count offers it to you with all his heart."

I handed to the Princess a small packet, sealed with the count's crest, and containing a cheque on a Roman banker, Jenkins. She read the paper, passed her hands over her eyes, looked me in the face, and again began coughing.

"Is it possible ?" she exclaimed, with a happy smile, pressing the paper to her heart ; "it is true then—it is not a hoax ?"

"Such exalted and important personages as

¹ A small Italian coin.

His Grace the Count Orloff never joke on such subjects," answered I.

The Princess all of a sudden jumped up from the sofa, clapped her hands like a child, and with tears and smiles threw her arms round my neck, screamed out something I could not make out, and ran out of the room.

From there I could hear her scream, "Unlimited credit!" and then, all at once, I could hear her hysterical sobs. The servants began running to and fro; Charnomski, pale and agitated, came into the room.

"Her Highness is so grateful to you," said he, pressing my hand with emotion. "You are the first to help her, the first who has kept his word. It is so rare now: the Princess had every reason to hesitate; she has been so often deceived. Yes, my countrymen enticed her here, and then deserted her. . . . The count invites her to come to Bologna. Whether she will consent or not, I do not know; but we must hope that she will decide to accept the invitation of the count. She is fearless, enterprising, as brave as a chevalier; and to reach the aim so dear to her heart, believe me, she will fear nothing."

"May I let the count know this?" I asked.

"Wait a short time—in her position—and

then, as you see, ill," answered Charnomski; "pass again in two or three days, we will let you know. *En attendant*,¹ keep all secret."

"But there are other Russians here," I answered, "who see the Princess. They may injure her. Who are they?"

Charnomski flushed to the very roots of his hair, looked embarrassed, gave me a side-long glance, and answered that he knew nothing about that.

I took my departure. Several days passed, but still I knew nothing of the Princess. We took it by turns, Christianok and I, to watch the house from one of the neighbouring restaurants, noticing who went in and out, and awaiting further events.

For the first two or three days all in the house was as quiet and solitary as usual. The doctor came several times, then a woman dressed all in black, covered with a long black veil, to all appearance a nun. She always used to remain a considerable time with the Princess. One evening a servant of the house brought up to

¹ Members of the higher society in Russia are accustomed to interlard their conversation with foreign,—especially French,—phrases. This is not astonishing when we consider what splendid linguists they are.

the *perron* a very handsome hired carriage ; a woman wrapped in a blue velvet mantilla came out with tottering steps, and took a seat in the carriage.

“ The Princess ! ” said I, to Christianok. “ We must follow and find out where she goes.”

We called a cab,¹ and followed her. The carriage, its blinds drawn down, rapidly passed through several streets, bowled out into the Corso, and drew up at the door of the banker Jenkins. All was clear now ; the magical key, the count’s cheque, had opened the door to the confiding and fearless beauty.

Another week passed, and still no news of the Princess. I had caught cold, and was obliged to keep indoors, but Christianok, who alone now watched the house, told me with great indignation that we had been made fools of, and nothing else ; the Princess did not even think of going to Bologna. She had, as the emissary learnt, paid all her debts ; the creditors and the police, who had threatened her with arrest, had been tranquillized, and had therefore left her at peace.

The house of Juani had wonderfully altered. Before the *perron* all day and late at night stood a whole crowd of carriages. The retinue of the

¹ An anachronism of the author.

Princess had again increased ; she had taken the two floors of the vast house of Juani, and had ordered herself splendid toilettes. Again, as before, she was to be seen constantly driving out, visiting museums, galleries, paying and receiving visits : she kept open house.

At this very time Rome was especially lively ; the new Pope was to be chosen in place of the late Clement XIV. In the evening the salons of the Princess were filled with the most celebrated painters, musicians, *littérateurs*, and high clergy. The “Unknown” in the black dress had not been seen for a long time. Once I had met her at the door of the house of Juani. On seeing me, she turned away impatiently, and, did I dream it?—said something in Russian. I just caught a glimpse of golden hair streaked with grey, and the angry flash of splendid grey eyes. The windows of the Princess were often open, and through them were heard the strains of the harp, on which she played artistically. A whole crowd of loiterers and beggars, always expecting her generous gratuities, surrounded the house from morning to night, and we could often hear them noisily applauding the splendid cavalcades of the Princess. I had quite recovered now, and could see for myself the Princess, as before, heedless,

gay, now riding a spirited charger, flying like the wind along the squares, in the streets, now driving in an open carriage; always merry, always laughing. Involuntarily I felt glad for her, poor young thing, having, through me, because of her sex, found help and support in her dark days. One thing alone vexed me. Christianok, who had been given to me as an assistant, began to hint at the possible want of candour of the count towards me. Rome began to talk of the lovely Princess, just as Venice had talked, and even—though in the last days so bitter against her—Ragusa. Christianok, somehow or other, learnt that the banker Jenkins had paid her in the name of the count 10,000 ducats. The revived beauty spent the money she received with a lavish hand, never thinking that some day it would come to an end. I was once invited to one of her *soirées*; the Princess seemed a radiant sun among surrounding stars. She played on the harp with such feeling, that I was deeply moved. Of her departure, however, she said nothing. She merely remarked once, *en passant*, “Be easy; it will be all right.”

At the end of a few days, on the advice of Christianok, I wrote her a letter, reminding her of the count. The answer was very long in

coming. We were lost in conjectures. At last I received a note from her, inviting me to meet her in the Church of Santa Maria dell' Angela.

It was evening. I went silently into the dim church, which was filled with the odour of incense. Here and there flickered a taper before the picture of some saint. A mysterious silence seemed to fill the deserted obscurity of the columns and *prie-dieux*. In the loneliest corner, behind a high *prie-dieu*, with a prayer-book in one hand, stood, wrapped in a very elegant mantilla, a tall slender figure, veiled—I recognised the Princess.

“The wish for the welfare and happiness of my fatherland, and future subjects,” said she, bending her head over her prayer-book, “is so strong in me that I have decided to accept the invitation of the count. Before, he frightened me; I did not believe him. Now I have full confidence. You see, I have kept my word. To all my friends I have said that I am bidding adieu to the world; that for the rest of my life I am shutting myself up in a nunnery.—To you I will say something else. . . .”

She lingered, as though gathering strength.

“To-morrow I take my departure,” said she, in a dignified voice; “not for a convent, but

with you for the Count Orloff's. You will not deceive me; you will not betray me?"

I silently bowed. What could I answer? I, the faithful subject of her Imperial Majesty. The eyes of the Princess were filled with exultation—with hopes. She knew no doubts, no distrust. Before me stood a woman deeply convinced. Pity for her involuntarily stole over me.

"And so till to-morrow, and then, *en route* . . ."

"Well, thank God, at last," thought I, "the count will now be able to convince her; he'll arrange matters for her."

She shook me warmly by the hand; seemed as though she wished to add something, then rapidly disappeared. I also directed my steps to the church porch. As I approached the vessel of holy water, a woman standing there stepped forward and stood in front of me. I recognised the person in black whom I had seen entering the house of Juani.

"Konsov," said she, in an indignant whisper in Russian, pushing me aside behind one of the columns; "you—you are a traitor."

"How dare you say that? Who are you?" asked I. "If you are Russian, tell me your name?"

"My name's nothing to you. You are in a

THE COUNT ALEXIS ORLOFF.



"He was neither revengeful,
Nor proud, wicked and deceitful."

"He was beloved by the Nation,
To the Empress true."

conspiracy against her; . . . you have persuaded her to go; . . . you have enticed her into a trap";—whispered, with agitation, the Unknown, gripping my hand. "Swear! . . . or you are a monster; just such a ruffian as those who got others to ruin another innocent—in Schlusselburg! . . ."

I remembered my grandmother had told me about the bloody drama of Merovitch.

"Fear nothing," said I; "before you, you see an honest officer. . . . I am only fulfilling my duty, and am convinced that only a better future awaits the Princess."

The Unknown raised her hand, and silently pointed to the image of the Virgin Mary.

"I can only repeat what I have already said," I whispered. "The Princess is safe, and a more happy fate awaits her."

She shook my hand, bowed, and silently left the church.

I followed her as far as I could with my eyes, trying to guess who she was, and why she took so profound an interest in the Princess.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEPARTURE FROM ROME.

It was the 12th of February. The day was very cold and northern-like, but withal very bright. The Princess, her suite and servants, took their seats in several carriages. At the Church of San Carlo she distributed rich alms to the poor, and then, followed by a whole crowd of artists and nobles, and amidst the cries and shouts of the populace, who ran after her, waving hats and caps, she left Rome. At the town gates, she signed her name in the books as Countess Selinski. She took the Florentine route.

I galloped in front, while Christianok followed closely behind her.

On the 16th of February the Princess arrived at Bologna. The count was not in town ; he was awaiting her in his more retired palace of Pisa.

The noisy train and crowd of servants following the Princess, and amounting to several dozens of people, exceedingly astonished the count. How-

ever, he received his visitor very respectfully and cordially, appointed her a splendid apartment, not far from his own, surrounded her with every comfort possible, and at all times conducted himself as a most faithful subject, never even, before strangers, sitting down in her presence. Strange things began to happen. What the count said to the Princess, what negotiations passed between them, no one of course knew. We could only surmise—as we did very soon—that a most hazardous game of love was being played. And, indeed, the Princess soon afterwards removed from her own apartment to that of the count, while her retinue and servants remained where they were. Christianok, ever since the arrival of the Princess, constantly tried to put me in the shade. He exalted his own services, as though the whole success of the plot was due to him alone. Of course my pride would only allow me to look upon all this with contempt. The count could see for himself that it was to my influence alone that he owed the arrival of the Princess.

Rumours began to circulate that Alexis Grevorvitch had made the Princess many presents; that among other things he had given her his own miniature, painted on ivory and encircled

with precious stones ; that for her he had, even from the very first, deserted his much beloved favourite, the lovely and amiable wife of the rich Alexandre Lvovitch Davidoff, a born Orloff. There remained no doubt. The enchantress had won the heart of the count, our *preux*. The lion had fallen in love with a gay butterfly. Dazzled by her, the count no longer made a secret of his passion. He was to be seen openly with her everywhere—on the promenade, at the opera, or at church : it was all the same. One day the Princess did me the honour to call me. She began asking me about this and about that and assured me several times that she had more confidence in me than in any one else. The count also was always most amiable. Christianok, seeing me again in favour, had recourse to a little ruse. The cunning Greek began to complain that the Princess had been very sparing in her attentions to him at Rome, and that he could not forget it ; she therefore, with the permission of the count, gave him a colonel's brevet. I was passed by. I bore this injustice without a murmur, relying on the confidence reposed in me by the count and the Princess, of which I was soon to have proofs.

“ Well Konsov ! ” said the count to me one

day, “honour and glory to you, who have known so well how to procure me the opportunity of making myself agreeable to such a person. We must prepare for her, in the future, a quiet and comfortable life. Is she not, truly, a lovely creature? What a lively and charming character! I must say, candidly, I’m almost ready to marry her myself, and have done with my bachelor life. . . .”

“Well and why not, your Grace?” answered I. “What should there be to prevent it?”

“She won’t consent, old fellow; she says, ‘I’ll consent only when I’m in my proper place.’”

“How so? Excuse me, I don’t understand. What proper place?”

“Oh! well, cannot you understand? . . . When she will be in Russia, at home,—well, when the empress will condescend to recognise her rights.”

“But is there any hope of that?”

Orloff became thoughtful.

“Well, I think,” said he, “that it might be possible; I hope her friends will not spoil everything. They follow her so closely here, all those Poles, those Jesuits of all kinds. Who knows? They may poison us. They may shoot us; or give us a stab at the corner of the street with

a hired *Kinjal*.¹ All they desire is a person for their disturbances."

The count seemed very much agitated. His frank, open and intelligent countenance seemed troubled. The passion of his heart, working as it were against his will, could be heard in his trembling voice, in each of his words.

The day ended. The count did not leave his visitor for a minute.

"Here's bad luck ! she won't listen. Really I don't know what to do," said he, one day, having summoned me. "If I could find some one to help me, . . . some one who could persuade her. . . ."

"Persuade her to what?" I asked.

"To a private marriage, and then flight. . . ."

"But with whom?"

"With me !"

"What ! your Grace ! but where to ?"

"To the end of the world, if need be. . . . Ah, yes, while I think of it, persuade her not to carry pistolets on her person ; the other day, in a passion, she nearly killed her own maid, Francesca."

Having uttered this confession, this athletic, this splendid Apollo-like count, stood before

¹ An Asiatic dagger.

me as flushed as a schoolgirl, and his eyes were cast down, just as if he were some love-sick youth awaiting his sentence.

What answer could I make him? In my agitation I was silent; but then, as always, I decided to remain his most devoted and obedient servant. After all, what was it? A marriage. There was nothing bad in that. In marrying her the count was only obeying the dictates of his heart, and while gaining in position by allying himself with Imperial blood, he was transforming the “Adventuress” into the modest Countess Orloff.

* * * * *

Here I must interrupt my narrative, and return to the present—to our poor frigate. My God! how awful! Tempest-tost, the *Northern Eagle* for five whole days was borne no one knew whither. All the reckonings, all the fathomings were being done in vain. To-day, at dawn, we passed Spain, not far from the African coast and near some wild stony islands. We made signals, but in the fog no one could see us. In the daytime, having finished my watch, I remained on deck. A most unbearable, sultry coast-wind, a boundless expanse of water, splashing between the rocks, a ship without mast or

compass, universal despair, and not the least hope of being saved : that is all we have before our eyes. The first reef, and we are lost. Irena, oh ! far-off charming traitress ! oh ! could you but see all the torments endured by the poor rejected exile ! Night, again a calm. I'm once more in my cabin. All-powerful God, give me only the strength to live through this night and finish writing my tale.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRINCESS SEEKS MY ADVICE.

THE exhausted commander sleeps soundly. Only the sentinels and I are on watch. I shall begin now to relate the saddest experience of all my life. This experience is the principal excuse for my writing this confession. May she who caused me to wander, an exile in a foreign land, remember that she was the involuntary participator in that action which will remain a source of regret and reproach to the end of my life.

It was at Bologna, to which place the count had removed.

The Princess had desired to see me. She kindly invited me to be seated, and took a chair herself. I noticed again those two hectic spots on her cheeks, that her eyes were literally glowing, and that she seemed quite beside herself.

“ Lieutenant, I sent for you to confide in you a secret,” she said, throwing an anxious glance around.

“ I am all attention, your Highness, and you may trust me,” I answered.

“ The count starts to-morrow for Livorno. Did you know it ? ”

“ Yes,” I answered.

“ You see, there has been a quarrel there, and a fight between some English and Russian sailors, and the count wishes to invite his friend, the English consul, a Mr. Dickson, to settle the matter.”

“ Well ! what about that ? ” I said. “ That’s nothing important ; it will soon be arranged, and the count will return.”

“ He has asked me to go with him. . . . What if I refuse ? If I don’t accompany him ? What do you think ? He’ll not desert me, as all the others have done, and disappear for ever ? ”

“ Oh ! but why not go ? ” answered I, following the idea of the count. “ It’s a simple promenade. Why not accompany the count ? The weather is splendid. It could only be a pleasure trip for you both.”

“ Yes,” she answered thoughtfully, “ I should very much like to see the town and your fleet ; the count praises his sailors so highly.”

“ Well, and what is there to prevent your going ? ” I said thoughtfully. “ Yes,” I said to myself, “ it would seem that the count is very

persistent. He won't leave her alone for a single instant."

"Ah! yes! I was forgetting," said the Princess, as though collecting her thoughts.

Looking at her, I could see that her eyes were full of tears, her lips trembling, and that, though looking at me, she seemed not to see me.

"Listen!" she said reluctantly. "You're an honest man. . . . The count has made me an offer of marriage—has proposed to me. What do you think of it?"

I rose respectfully.

"Allow me to congratulate you from the bottom of my heart," I said earnestly, bowing. "Your merit has triumphed over everything. But there is nothing wonderful in that."

"But will he not deceive me? Will he not betray me?" whispered the Princess, again glancing around.

Her very lips were blanched; she was quite beside herself.

"Tell me the whole truth, I implore you! You see, following his advice, I carry no arms upon me; it offends him. . . ."

It flashed through my mind that just during this very journey the count might persuade her to marry him.

“But, your Highness,” said I, and those fatal words burn now in my brain like letters of fire, “what do you fear? The count is madly in love with you, that I know surely. He sleeps but to see you in his dreams; even, he wanted to fly away with you.”

“Then it is the truth? Swear by the memory of your mother, of your father,” said she, squeezing my hand with all her might.

“In the name of God, it is true! I heard it from his own lips. He honoured me with his confidence. Besides, what am I in his eyes? Nothing; the meanest servant, the merest cipher, . . . and yet he told even me openly. . . .”

The Princess fixed her eyes on the image of the Saviour crowned with thorns hung up in the corner of the room, and she remained motionless for several minutes, as though breathing a silent and fervent prayer.

“The brave alone live!” said she, rising and drawing herself up to her full height. “Once his wife, he cannot betray me. . . . I shall go. . . . But, remember, I’ll not give up either liberty or heart without a struggle. . . . What is to happen will happen soon. . . .”

I again heartily congratulated the Princess.

“Ah! another thing, Konsov,” she said, stop-

ping me. "Tell me truly, in all conscience, as before God, is it this same Orloff who helped your empress to obtain the throne?"

"The very same."

"How brave! how gallant! what a hero!" said the Princess, with animation. "Fearless Cid! Bayard! A spark of God's Spirit gives such men their bravery and their fearlessness."

I went away full of joy at the successful issue of our plan. Still I had certain misgivings. "Does the Princess know of his other feat? Why did I not tell her of that other dark, unpardonable sin?" I was only faithful to my duty, obeyed the orders of my superior, but could not help pitying the woman.

Heavy doubts overwhelmed me, and all night I could not shut my eyes. "Duty is duty, but, if—? Should I go to-morrow morning," whispered my conscience, "and warn her? There's time; let her think well, weigh everything, and then decide."

When dawn broke, I got up, dressed, and hastened to the house of the count. Before the house quite a crowd of people had collected. Carriages were driving to and fro. I made my way through the throng. The count and Princess had already taken their seats in a carriage.

Christianok was seated in another. Some of the servants occupied a third.

“ Make haste, Konsov ! Take your place. We were only waiting for you ! ” Unconsciously almost I took my place by Christianok.

The train started. After the heavy rain, the morning had emerged into a beautiful calm.

“ What do you see in all this ? ” Christianok asked me, when we had fairly started.

“ In what ? ”

“ Well, in this little *voyage* ? ”

“ I really do not know, and dare not guess, ” I answered.

“ Well, to-morrow there will be a bridal couple, ” he said, and smiled. “ They’ll be married. ”

“ But where’s the church ? ”

“ What is the Fleet church for ? They’ll get on the Admiralty ship, and there be spliced in a trice. But of course it was only for that she consented to go. . . . ”

“ Then it *is* true ? ”

“ Well ! don’t you see it yourself ? The count seems to be on wings ; it seemed too good to be true. So, you see, the fairy tale will soon become a true event. ”

At Livorno, the Count Orloff was met by the commander of our squadron, Admiral Samuel

Carlovitch Greig. Afterwards the count and Princess paid him a visit, and then called on the English consul, drove out with him, his wife, and a whole circle of visitors into the country, and then went for a sail in boats with music ; everywhere they were followed by a curious mob. In the evening of the second day of their arrival at Livorno, the count and the Princess went to the opera. On their return, I noticed in the vestibule of the splendid marble palace assigned to the count another intriguing Greek also serving in our fleet, Joseph Michaelevitch Ribas, or, as he called himself, De Ribas. He also somewhat resembled Christianok, being as black as a beetle ; but being taller and not so nimble, we used to call the pair of them the Beetle and Cockchafer. De Ribas, as I afterwards learnt, had been engaged even sooner than I or Christianok, having been sent to Venice to collect information about the Princess.

"Good-bye, priest," said the count to Ribas. laughing and not noticing me. "Mind, don't forget the vestments."

"Vestments, . . . and why priest ?" I stood under the marble colonnade bewildered, lost in thought, hardly seeing the lovely blue boundless sea and our squadron.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE "MARRIAGE."

THE 22nd of February was lovely, almost like summer in its warmth, not a cloud in the skies, the sea calm as a mirror, a holiday feeling in the air. The English consul had invited the count and Princess, and all their suite to luncheon. The Princess arrived, splendidly and tastefully dressed, and, as always, gay and lively. Where was her illness? She chatted merrily with the other guests. On the terrace, adorned with flowers, she walked, carelessly laughing and joking. Every one showed her the greatest attention and respect.

Count Alexis Gregorevitch was a model *cavalier-servant* of the Princess, holding her fan and her gloves, and taking from the hands of the servants the cool refreshing drinks, to offer them himself to her. All noticed that his amorous glances followed her everywhere, and that she seemed born to new life. As by magic

her languor had disappeared ; her *preux chevalier*, the tamed lion, was at her feet.

"Ha! our Celadon, what think you of him?" whispered Christianok. "Yes, resting on his laurels of Chesma, the hero does not disdain another conquest!"

Admiral Greig, by nature of a very taciturn disposition, took no part in the conversation, but sat a little apart, extremely stern, sad of countenance, and with downcast eyes, seeming to notice nothing.

Some one walked up to the window. From there you could see the blue sea and the Russian flotilla. The ladies began talking of pleasant sails on the sea.

"Well, count! show us your ships," said the Princess. "In Civita Vecchia you showed them the mock-fight of Chesma; you gave others pleasure, honour us also."

"All is ready," answered Orloff, bowing respectfully.

The whole party went down to the sea-shore. Count Alexis Gregorevitch was specially respectful to the Princess. He himself placed her shawl on her shoulders, and taking her parasol from the hands of her maid, opened it, and, walking by her side, shielded her from the sun, all the while

whispering in her ears the most passionate protestations of love.

The whole crowd of spectators collected on the sea-shore looked admiringly at his general's uniform of dark green with red facings, all covered with gold embroidery, which adorned his splendid figure, and on all sides we could hear cries of "*Vivat*," mixed with whispers of "Oh ! what a couple ! "

They all took their places in the boats and barges standing ready by the sea-shore. The Princess seated herself in a splendid gilded barge, ornamented and arranged with imperial luxury. The wives of Admiral Greig and of the English consul took their places by her side. The count went with the Admiral, and I with the retinue of the Princess. The barge floated in the direction of the Russian flotilla. We were received by the squadron with the greatest pomp. Flags waved everywhere. The officers in their brightest uniforms stood at their posts ; the sailors at the masts. From all the ships floated the most delicious music. The waves gently rocked us. The receding shore was covered with spectators.

As we touched the admiral's ship, the *Three Hierarchs*, a splendid gilt arm-chair was let

down, in which first of all the Princess was pulled up, and then the other ladies. We mounted the trap. The ladies had hardly stepped on deck, when from all sides came cries of "Hurrah!" and cannon were fired. The sight was splendid. The spectators in the streets and on shore merrily waved their hats and handkerchiefs. All were in high expectation that Orloff would conduct the manœuvres, and, to make the illusion more complete, would burn some old useless ship. A great many glasses were pointed at us from the shore. Dozens of little boats, filled with onlookers, started from the shore in the direction of our ship. On board the *Three Hierarchs* there seemed to be great commotion. The whole staff of the admiral's servants were running to and fro, with trays loaded with wine, bon-bons, and fruit. There was dancing in the saloon. The younger gentlemen and ladies were dancing with all their heart the *contre-danse* and *cotillon*. The wives of the admiral and consul surrounded the Princess with little attentions.

The ladies were soon invited into a special cabin, where presently they were joined by the count and the admiral, who were busily talking together. The latter seemed quite out of sorts, and very gloomy.

“They are going to marry the count and the Princess,” I heard one of the officers whisper to another.

I was dumbfounded.

“But why here?” asked the one to whom the question was addressed. “Why all this mystery, all this haste?”

“There’s no Russian church here. The admiral has lent his, and that accounts for the Princess’s arrival at Livorno, and her presence on board.”

After a little while the decks began to be deserted, and many of the suite, getting into the barges, were rowed back to land, amongst others, the two cunning and clever Greeks, Ribas and Christianok.

On seeing them, I do not know why, there flashed through my mind the words of the count to Ribas,—“Priest and vestments.” In the meantime there were no clergy to be seen on board. The deck was becoming more and more deserted. The officers were walking backwards and forwards, gaily chatting and pointing their glasses at the occupants of the boats. The band played a very gay march, and then an aria from a well-known opera.

What took place below all this while has remained a mystery. Several asserted afterwards

that nothing particular had occurred, but that at table the betrothal of the count and Princess had been solemnly announced, and that all had drunk the health of the bridal couple. Others on oath protested that in another cabin there had been a mock marriage between the count and Princess, so that Orloff, in her eyes at least, might seem to be keeping his word, and that in this sacrilegious ceremony the *rôle* of Priest and Deacon had been played by Christianok and Ribas, who were dressed up in the vestments of the clergy of the fleet, the first acting the part of deacon, and the second that of priest.

But I am running on too fast; let us return to the deck of the *Three Hierarchs*.

My strength fails me; my heart bursts; the pen falls from my fingers when I recollect all that I was so soon to see.

Wherever I shall be,—if I remain, by a miracle of God, alive, or if I am destined to perish in the waves,—the remembrance of all that I then saw will only be effaced from my mind with my last dying groan.

The deck was full of life. All had left the cabins, and were now sitting in detached groups; there was laughing and talking on all sides;

servants were running to and fro, with cooling drinks and wine.

The Princess was leaning over the side of the vessel. The wind was rising; it was getting cool. She called me to her side with a friendly nod. I helped her to put on her mantilla.

“If I live a hundred years I shall not forget this,” she whispered, with a happy smile, shaking me warmly by the hand. “You have kept your word. All is being fulfilled. I shall soon be in Russia, and once there—why not hope? They will proclaim the future Empress Elizabeth II. . . . Oh! now is the time for wonders. The present empress, what was she a little while ago?”

Those words filled me with astonishment. I was silent, bewildered by the wild fantasies of this poor blinded creature.

On board the *Three Hierarchs* they hoisted a signal flag. Again the roar of the cannon was heard, mingled with the cries of “Hurrah!” The bands on all the ships again began playing; the flotilla was beginning its manœuvres. Enchanted by all this attention on the part of her future subjects, the Princess, still leaning against the side of the ship, seemed plunged in agreeable thought, as her eyes followed the curling smoke

from the shots and the movements of the different ships.

I see her now, as she then stood, in her blue velvet mantilla, a small black straw hat, and a white parasol in her hands.

I also was lost in thought. Yes, all is finished now! The count has found a companion for life. He will know how to persuade her. Together they will fly to the feet of a merciful empress.

CHAPTER XIV.

TREACHERY.

“YOUR swords, gentlemen!” resounded a most loud and commanding voice near me.

I glanced round. Captain Litvenoff addressed himself by turn to all the adjutants and others in the count’s retinue, demanding their swords. The deck was covered with armed sailors. Admiral Greig, his wife, and the consul were nowhere to be seen. Quite bewildered, I surrendered my sword, as did all the others. The Princess, hearing the clatter of arms and loud words, turned rapidly round. She was as pale as death; she had taken in the situation at a glance.

“What does all this mean?” she asked in French.

“In the name of the empress, you are arrested,” answered the captain.

“Violence! force!” screamed the Princess.
“Help,—here,—to me!”

She rushed to the trap, forcing her way with her feeble hands through the ranks of armed

men. The sailors, sunburnt and sullen, looked at her in astonishment. Litvenoff stopped her.

“ Impossible ! ” said he. “ Be calm.”

“ Perfidy ! Malediction ! ” madly cried she. “ How dare you—with a woman—with a Russian Princess. Do you hear ? Let me pass,” she cried to the soldiers in French. “ Where is Count Orloff ? Call him here. Bring him here. You shall answer for all this ! ”

“ The count, by order of the empress and admiral, is also arrested,” answered Litvenoff, respectfully bowing. “ He is arrested just as you are ! ”

The Princess gave a loud scream, and drew back.

Her reproachful glance fell upon me. It seemed to pierce my heart like a dagger, as though saying, “ It is your fault. You have ruined me.”

She staggered back a few steps, and then fainted away.

The sailors carried her into the cabin. All the servants, except her maid, who remained with her, had been arrested, and under a strong escort had been transferred to another ship.

* * * * *

Shattered in my innermost soul by all that I had seen, I recovered my senses to find myself

in a small dim cabin. Lifting up my head, I saw that I was shut in with that dastard Christianok, the principal author of our misery, the perpetrator of the treachery. I cannot say what astonishment I showed. My comrade, at all events, was very calm. He was lounging, and eating some bon-bons he had snatched up from the table, and glancing from time to time at our closed door.

“ You’re astonished ? ” he asked me. “ Is it not true ? What wonderful things ! Yes ? ”

“ Yes, there’s enough to be astonished at ! ” I answered, concealing my disgust with difficulty.

“ It was impossible otherwise,” said he.

“ Why ? ”

“ Because only the bait of marriage could tempt this adventuress.”

“ Yes ! but why play with her feelings, with her heart ? ” said I, impatiently.

“ We should never have got her on board, otherwise.”

“ There were many other ways. I know myself that the count promised her on his oath to marry her, and that once his wife, she would have trusted herself with our fleet.”

“ Ah ! my dear Konsov, what simplicity ! ” chuckled the cunning knave. “ Is it possible you

have not yet guessed? Why, at the very moment when the count was playing with the Princess at the most tender protestations of love, I was writing under his dictation, and in his name, a letter to the empress, telling her that he had decided to do everything to catch the adventuress, and even, if need be, to tie a stone to her neck, and throw her into the river."

"And why didn't you straightway drown her?" I cried out, scarcely knowing what I said. "It would have been far more merciful than to deceive the poor unfortunate, consumptive creature. . . ."

"She'll live long enough, yet," said Christianok. "The orders were to catch her quietly, cleverly, without any noise. That's just what we have done."

I heard these cold hard words with the greatest indignation. I was almost beside myself at the heartlessness of the wily Greek.

"No! enough, old man. Calm your knightly feelings; that's all bosh. In our time, remember, the most important thing is courage, and impudence itself must be clever and sharp. Success means might and riches; non-success, poverty, or what is worse, Siberia. No, you had better get up. Don't you see that it's time?"

Raising my head, I saw that our door was open, and through it I could see the whole crew, walking to and fro, and talking gaily. The Greek and I were taken into the ward-room. There on the table stood a whole battery of wine bottles. The room was filled with the fumes of tobacco and punch. We were forced to drink, and then sent on shore. There I learnt that the count had all this time been with the admiral at the consul's, discussing their future movements.

In the evening the streets of Livorno were filled with turbulent and indignant crowds. The Russians shut themselves up in their houses. Involuntarily I grasped my hat and cloak, and taking the most deserted streets, proceeded to the sea-shore.

CHAPTER XV.

REMORSE.

I FELL down on the shore. Oh ! my God ! what anguish ! Tears blinded me. Sobs stifled me. I hated, I cursed the whole world. "How," thought I, "could such a dastardly, godless deed be perpetrated, and I all the while a partaker in the crime ?" My whole frame shook with indignation, with madness, as with horror I turned over in my mind every little detail ; thought over all the disgusting and dastardly meanness, the fiendish calculation, the treachery of him to whom I had been so faithful and so devoted, and who had not scrupled to sport with that most sacred feeling—love. I could fancy to myself at that very minute that poor deserted woman, half killed with misery. I could picture her in my mind sitting in her dark prison, her soul torn with anguish ; who knows, perhaps chained and watched over by coarse, brutal soldiers. "And when did all that take place ?" I repeated to myself. "When all seemed so smiling, when all

her golden dreams seemed ready to be fulfilled." The obscure daughter of the late empress had seen at her feet the highest dignitary of the new empress. The whole fleet had met her with cries of joy, with roars of cannon. What must she have felt? what must she have experienced? From under the rock where I was lying I could see the lovely sunset, gilding with its last rays the top of the hills, the crosses on the town churches, and, fading almost entirely, the outlines of the ships at sea. "Oh! infamy! infamy!" I whispered. "Count Orloff has sullied his soul with an action still darker than all the rest. No laurels, not even the laurels of Chesma, will now be able to shield him from the justice of God or man. And also, according to our services, shall justice be meted out to us—his accomplices in that dark deed."

My despair was so strong that I was ready to have done with life.

"No; repent all thy life, repent," seemed to whisper an inner voice. "Search for means to redeem thy dark crime."

A gun was fired from the flag-ship, and on all the other ships nearer were heard the strains of the vesper music, and then the prayers rose on the still air. The sable veil of night descended

on the sea; on the guard-ship, and along the shore, the watch-fires began to be lighted. I rose, and, hardly able to drag my feet along, crawled home. There I found the orderly of the count waiting for me. I followed him.

“ Well! Konsov! now confess you were a little astonished,” said the count coming to meet me.

My tongue clove to the roof of my month. Well, what could I have said in answer to him? He, gifted with all the blessings of life; this *preux* chevalier; this dignitary, brave, bold, daring, courageous, loaded with honours, a short time ago my idol, was now to me loathsome, unbearable.

“ Do you think that I don’t remember? that I have forgotten? ” he continued, avoiding looking me straight in the face. “ Oh! I know well that for the most important part I am indebted to you. . . . Had it not been her faith in you, and in your interest, it would not have been so easy to cage the bird. . . . ”

The words of the count literally stung me. I stood confused, bewildered.

“ But, perhaps you do not know, you have not heard,” as if to console me, said the count—“ do not take on so—we had received from Petersburg the most formal and detailed instructions concerning this usurper, this person who had taken to

herself a name and lineage not belonging to her. The order was to arrest her at any cost, and bring her there. Well, now have you understood?"

In my confusion and trouble I could make no answer.

"The Pretender is now in our hands. The will of our Sovereign has been fulfilled, and the prisoner will soon sail for the north. There'll be enough inquiries set on foot; they'll dig down to the very roots. . . . All that's not the work of foreigners alone. I think there'll be mixed up in this not a few of our own travellers. In the papers of that liar there are not a few well-known signatures. . . . "

"Yes, you're rejoicing; there'll be again new arrests, again inquiries," thought I. "And yourself, what did you do, stony-hearted man?"

"Why don't you say something?" asked the count.

"The whole town is in agitation; there are mobs, screams, threats. Have a care, count," I added, unable to conceal my disgust; "this is not Russia. . . . You might get a stab when least expecting it."

"Ah, well, my fine fellow," said he frowning, "whoever touches you or any other of ours, or

even threatens, just point to the sea. . . . Seven hundred cannon, all sweeping the whole shore. I've only to raise my hand, and the whole town will be level and clear. There, go now, and tell every one that, and add that I fear no one. . . .”

“Braggart!” thought I to myself, shivering with rage.

I left the count without opening my mouth, and without even a bow.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BOTTLE CAST INTO THE SEA.

SEVERAL wretched, unbearable days passed. Livorno really rose, and began to threaten us with an open attack. The indignant populace by night and by day surrounded the palace of the count, and from time to time threw stones at the building. The count was protected by a body-guard of sailors. Boats filled with ladies and gentlemen were constantly sailing between the ships to try and catch a glimpse of the unfortunate prisoner. I was sent on board the *Three Hierarchs* with a letter and parcel of books which had been confided to me by the count, as I learnt afterwards, for the Princess. As I was returning to the shore I heard a cry, and turning round, was petrified. At the open window of the *Three Hierarchs* I could see, pressed to the iron grating, a pale countenance and a hand waving a hand-kerchief. I also answered by waving my hand. Was it noticed or not from the ship, behind the high waves? I never knew. The sailors plied

their oars sturdily; there was a strong breeze, and the boat flew on the dancing waves.

* * * * *

Rumours began to circulate that the fleet would soon set sail. Where for was not yet known.

I got ready to go out and learn, if possible, if I was to remain on the Count's staff. I was just taking up my hat, when some one entered the room. I turned round. At the door stood a dark figure. On looking at her, I recognised the Russian stranger of the Church Santa Maria.

Her travel-stained dress showed she had just come a long journey.

“ You recognise me,” said she, throwing back her veil, and I could see that her golden, wavy hair had become grey.

“ What do you want ? ” I asked her.

“ That's how you answered for her. Those are your promises,” said she, advancing a step towards me. “ Where are your assurances, your word of honour as a true man ? ”

“ Listen to me. . . . I am innocent,” I began.

“ Dastards ! ruffians ! ” she screamed. “ They've laid a trap, they've enticed her, they've ruined the poor unfortunate, and then, think *you*, they will all go scot free? You are easy now, you

think. You mistake. The hour of retribution is near ; it will come—it will come—”

She advanced on me so menacingly, that I retreated to the open window. We were on the second storey, and the window looked out on the garden. I was very glad that at this minute the garden was quite deserted. The noise could have attracted eaves-droppers, who might have insulted the stranger, whose visit I could in no way understand, and who, as it seemed to me, was quite incapable of being convinced.

“ *You’re innocent?* ” she asked. “ *Innocent?* ”

“ Yes. I acted honestly. You will see. I’ll show you ; I’ll prove it to you . . . ”

“ Answer me.—You advised the Princess to come here.—You persuaded her ! ”

“ I persuaded her.”

“ You convinced her of the possibility of a marriage with Orloff. No prevarication. You hear ; give me a straight answer,” repeated this woman, trembling with emotion.

“ The count himself assured me, on his word of honour, that he meant marriage.”

“ *Perfidious betrayer ! Death to you !* ” cried the stranger, throwing her hands wildly about.

I had no time to step back. A bullet whizzed by me. I was blinded by the smoke. I caught

the mad woman by the wrist. She began struggling with all her might, her face distorted with passion, and once more fired at me, luckily with no more success than at the first time. Wrestling the pistol from her hands, I threw it in the garden. The noise had attracted the servants. I heard knocks at the door. I flew to open it, and trying to appear as calm as possible, I assured them that having unloaded my pistol at the window, it had gone off, but that nothing had happened. They all left me and went away, throwing side-glances at me. Having shut the hall door, I returned to the stranger. I was in a state of mind impossible to describe.

“Ah! ah! what have you done? How could you? And for what? Why?”

My visitor put her head on the table and sobbed wildly.

I began to pace the room up and down, and happening to glance at the mirror, I saw a face which I could with difficulty recognise as my own.

“Look here,” at last said I to my visitor, “dry your tears. You must know that I myself was the victim of the most abominable deceit.” I began relating to her everything that had passed. “You see,” said I, finishing, “God is merciful, and I am still alive. Now in your turn; explain.”

The stranger could not for a long time utter one word. Having given her some water, I invited her to follow me into the garden. Here, finally, she recovered her power of speech. Two or three times she looked at me humbly, as though asking for pardon, then at length she began.

“My tale is sadder than yours is,” she said, sobbing, after we had taken a few turns in the garden, and had sat down; “but I have been so guilty towards you,” covering her face with her hands, “that you will never forgive me.”

“Forget all about that,” said I, recovering my composure. “I am ready to forgive everything. . . . All comes from God. . . . Everything is in His hands. . . .”

The stranger turned towards me her pale, sorrowful countenance, and taking me by the hand again began sobbing.

“You are so generous,” she whispered. “Did you ever hear of the fate of Merovitch?”

“Oh, yes! of course!”

“Well! I am—the guilty cause of his tentative. . . . I was his affianced bride, Polixena Pchelkina.”

I was speechless. . . . All the details of the attempt of Merovitch, which I had heard ten

years ago from my old grandmother, memory brought back vividly.

Bending towards her, I took her hand, the one that had just fired at me, and pressed it with emotion.

“ Speak! speak! ” whispered I.

“ I could no longer remain in Russia,” she continued in a strange hurried voice. “ For ten years I’ve wandered in all directions. I lived in the nunneries of Volhynie and Lithuania. I tended the sick and afflicted. A year ago, residing on the borders of the Volga, I first heard about the Princess Tarakanova, Dame D’Azow, and Wladimirskaya. Persons, quite unknown to me, called me to her side. You can understand how I longed to be near her. I tried to get an interview with her. Furnished with means by those same unknown persons, I first made the acquaintance of the Princess by letter, and then personally at Ragusa. I instinctively believed her. Oh! I did wish her happiness. Retribution for the past! I took care of her, taught her her native language and history, counselled her, informed her on all points. I followed her everywhere. After her departure from Ragusa to Rome, I wrote to her, exhorted her to take care. I was so convinced of her high destiny.

You know the rest. . . . What was my horror when I heard she was arrested ! But I shall remain at Livorno. I shall wait. . . . Oh ! the Livornians will set her free ! But tell me, what do you think of her ? Are you also convinced she is no Pretender, but really the daughter of the Empress Elizabeth ? ”

“ I can neither affirm nor deny.”

“ But I am convinced. That idea is entwined round my heart, and I cannot abandon it.”

My visitor rose. Having thrown her veil over her head, she fixed her eyes upon me, pressed my hand, and, looking as though she wished to say something more, with faltering steps she took her leave.

“ You are good ; you are compassionate,” said she, turning round on reaching the garden gate. “ Till better times ! ”

I saw this mysterious person once or twice. I went to her by invitation. She was living in a small *asteria*, at the sign of “ The Lily,” within the walls of the convent of the Ursulines, whither she had taken refuge. She still hoped that the Princess might be saved, in England or in Holland, which our squadron had to pass.

“ She — the persecuted — she is sent from

Heaven to resuscitate her birthland," constantly repeated Polixena, at our last meeting. "I believe in her. She will not be lost. She will be saved!"

* * * * *

In the night of the 26th of February, our fleet, under the flag of the Vice-Admiral Greig, was suddenly ordered to raise anchors and sail for the West. Christianok, with the report of the count to the empress, travelled by land. He was ordered to go on to Moscow, where, after the execution of Pougachoff, the empress had taken up her residence. Count Alexis Gregorevitch at the same time left Livorno. His residence there was attended with too much risk. Indignant at his dastardly act, the sons of the ardent and free Italy became at last so enraged against him, that the count, notwithstanding his strong escort, dared not leave the house, and, fearing poison, partook of only bread and milk.

I started later on. As if at the dictates of a fatal destiny, I was ordered on board the newly manned frigate, *The Northern Eagle*. This frigate took not only the sick men of the crew, but also the great collection which the count had been at so much pains to acquire, consisting of pictures, statues, bronzes, and other rare things. They

were the fruit of the count's victories in the Turkish and Grecian waters. Amongst other things I found several presents made by the Princess to the count, and, to my astonishment, her portrait, resembling so much Elizabeth. "But God's ways are not our ways." Hardly had we loaded the frigate with the riches of Orloff, and left the harbour, when we encountered a most awful storm. I could not say to the frigate, "You carry Cæsar!" Long were we tossed on the waves, thrown first on the coast of Algiers, then on that of Spain. Near Gibraltar our two masts and all our sails were wrenched away. Finally, we lost our rudder. For more than a week the current and a light breeze have borne us along the African coast. We have all lost courage, and can but pray. On the tenth day, that is to say, yesterday, the wind quite fell. I go on writing—but can we expect to be saved in this condition? The frigate, like a lifeless corpse, maimed and disfigured in battle, is borne whither the waves drive her—

* * * *

Again another hopeless day has passed. The dark terrifying night is coming on. Clouds are gathering; again the wind is rising; now it is raining. The coast of Africa has disappeared,

and we are carried on to the West. The waves are lashing against the sides of the ships, splashing the deserted deck. The leak in the hold is getting larger every minute. The exhausted sailors can hardly pump any longer. The cannon have been thrown overboard. At night we fire our muskets, vainly imploring aid, but there's not a sail to be seen. We, doomed to perdition, are alone. No one hears us. Tragic, awful fate. To be lost on a solitary ship, without hope, and with all the spoils of the commander-in-chief. When will the end come? On which rock is our ship destined to be wrecked, on which fated to founder? Fit retribution for the action of others. The fatal cargo of Count Orloff is hateful to God.

* * * * *

Three o'clock in the night. My confession is ended. The bottle is ready; and if there's no hope of being saved, I'll throw it in the sea.

One word more. I should like to let Irena — my last greeting; my last wish.—She ought to know—Good God! what is that? Impossible! Already the end? What an awful crash!—The frigate has struck something. Ah! screams.—I must run to my crew.—His Holy Will be done.

* * * * *

The bottle was thrown overboard, with the

diary and a note. The last was written in French: "Whoever finds this diary is requested to forward it to Livorno, to the Russian lady, Mistress Pchelkina. Should she not be found, to Russia, Chernigoff, Brigadier Leon Rakitin, for his daughter, Irena Rakitin. May 15th, 1775. Pavel Konsov, lieutenant of the Russian fleet."

END OF PART I.

PART II.

RAVELIN ALEXÉEF.

CHAPTER XVII.

EKATERINA AT MOSCOW.

THE Empress Ekaterina spent the summer of 1775 in the *alentours* of Moscow, honouring with her presence the village of Kolomensk, and then that of Chérnaya-griaz, which she had bought from Prince Kantomir. It had been named in honour of its new mistress Tzaritzin. She, in buying it, intended it to take the place of the Muscovite Tzarskoë-selo.

On the borders of a dark forest, in the midst of fallen maples, a two-storied wooden palace had been hastily erected, with a few outhouses, some stables and a poultry yard.

From the windows of her new palace the empress could admire the extensive and deep clear lakelets shaded by wooded hills, the boundless newly-mown plains, with, scattered here and there, the white shirts of the mowers, and the

blue and red *sarafans* of the hay-makers. Beyond these plains others could be seen, yet untouched by the sickle, sparkling in all their emerald beauty; and again, beyond these, the newly-ploughed corn-fields, and behind these, as far as the eye could reach, green plains and wooded hills; all this coloured and warmed by a lovely sun in a blue cloudless sky.

Life here was simple and free. Through the constantly open windows the scent of the newly-mown hay and of the forest depths penetrated everywhere. Often would a blackbird fly in from the river, and from the plains came the grasshoppers and the moths. From the early morning the whole Court would be scattered in the forest, picking flowers, looking for mushrooms, fishing or sailing on the lakes, riding and driving in the neighbourhood. Ekaterina, for the time being clothed in a simple white morning robe, and wearing a cap over her simply twisted hair, would be seated at her writing table, writing out schemes and drafts of various ukases, or letters to the Parisian philosopher and *publiciste* Baron Grimme. She complained to him that her servants would not give her more than two quills a day, as they knew very well that she could not regard with indifference a piece of white paper

and a well-trimmed quill, but must sit down and indulge her mania for paper soiling.

At the very time when all the world were tiring their brains over the politics of the Russian empress, as to what she would undertake in regard to Turkey, which she had desolated, or were discussing the delayed news of that recently stifled insurrection on the Volga, the late execution of Pougachoff, and of the mysterious Princess Tarakanova arrested lately at Livorno, Ekaterina was describing to the Baron Grimme the lives of her pet dogs.

These dogs were called at Court “Sir Tom Anderson, and his consort” (by second marriage) “Mimi, Lady Anderson.” They were such tiny, shaggy little things, with sharp, intelligent noses, and comical wiry tails, just like brooms. These dogs had nice little soft mattresses and wadded silk counterpanes, stitched by the hands of the Empress herself. Ekaterina wrote to Grimme, how fond she and Sir Tom were of sitting at the open window, and how Tom, with his fore-paws on the window-sill, notwithstanding his contemplation of nature, would bark and snarl at the horses towing the barges up the river. “The views around are lovely, though a trifle monotonous, and Sir Tom is delighted with the woods,

the hills, and with the lovely quiet gardens and manors, half buried in bright green, beyond which, in the far-off blue, you can just distinguish the tops of the golden Muscovite churches. This village wilderness and solitude just suit the hearts of Sir Anderson and his consort. Forgetting the noise of the city and its gaiety, they admire the beauties around them, and it is only at a late hour that they allow themselves to be persuaded to seek their warm wadded coverlets. The mistress of the house also likes these solitary Russian hamlets, forests and plains. I love these unploughed new places," wrote Ekaterina to Grimme, "and I must say that I feel from my heart that I only fit in where all is untouched and unspoilt."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PRINCESS AT ST. PETERSBURG.

THE fresh and clear atmosphere of the Muscovite environs began to be foggy. Clouds were gathering, lightning darting, thunder rolling. The Court also had its storms. Ekaterina had no easy task in investigating the insurrection of Pougachoff. He astonished every one by preserving to the very last minute the firm conviction that he would be pardoned, that they would never execute him. “The wretch has not much sense—he still hopes!” wrote the empress, after reading the interrogation of the Pretender. “Human nature is unfathomable.”

Pougachoff was executed in January.¹

About the middle of May Ekaterina received information that the squadron under the command of Greig had anchored at Cronstadt. The empress sent her whole correspondence with Orloff about the Pretender to the governor-

¹ His hands and feet were chopped off, and he was then hanged. He himself had executed hundreds thus.

general of Petersburg, Prince Galitzin, and gave him the following order:—"Have the *voyageurs* transferred secretly from the ship, and submit them to the severest interrogation."

Prince Alexandre Michaelovitch Galitzin, defeated by Frederick the Great, and afterwards for his victories over the Turks elected to the post of field-marshall, seemed a very imposing personage; but in reality he was the best-hearted and most modest and just of men, and an entire stranger to all Court intrigues. He was loved and respected by all.

On the 24th May the prince summoned an officer of the Préobrajenski regiment, by name Tolstoï, made him take an oath of secrecy, and ordered him to start for Cronstadt to receive the prisoner who would be given over to him, and carefully hand her over to the commandant of the Petropavlovski fortress, Andre Gavrilovitch Tchernishoff.

Tolstoï fulfilled his mission on the night of the 25th of May. In a specially manned yacht, he sailed down the Neva very gently to the fortress, where he gave up his prisoner. At first she was lodged hastily in a room just under the apartment of the commandant. Afterwards she was transferred to the Ravelin Alexéef. Oushakoff, secre-

tary to the Prince Galitzin, had already prepared a report about her from the papers sent by the empress. Oushakoff was brisk, paunchy, stout, and always panting and repeating with a knavish smile in his eyes—"Oh! my dear fellow, so much to do, so much to do! I only serve the prince for the honour of it, but I ought long ago to have taken my *abshiede*,¹ I am literally worn out."

The Prince Galitzin pondered long over the report of Oushakoff, drew up a whole list of questions, and with a very important mien, which did not in the least become his good-natured face, entered the prison of the captive. He was very much put out by the news which he had just heard, that on the journey, not far from England, the captive had nearly escaped; that at Plymouth she had all at once thrown herself overboard into a small vessel, which was in readiness for her (as was easily to be seen), and that it was with great difficulty and disregard for her cries and groans that they had managed to get her on board again. The prince was afraid that some one might attempt to effect her escape here. The captive, terrified, confused by all that had happened, by her gloomy and dismal prison, did not deny that she was called and was looked upon as

¹ German.—"Leave of Absence."

a Russian grand-duchess. She even went so far as to declare that, recollecting her childhood, she, on the strength of circumstances, believed herself to be the grand-duchess of whom mention was made in the will of the Emperor Peter I., which, she said, she had found among her papers, and which was all in favour of the late Empress Elizabeth, and by the will of Elizabeth made in favour of her daughter. A copy of this interrogation was sent to Moscow to the Empress Ekaterina, who was very indignant at the impudence of the captive, and especially when she found a letter addressed to herself, signed "Elizabeth." "Well, that woman is a *fieffée canaille*,"¹ exclaimed Ekaterina, crumpling the letter in her hands, after having read it. Potemkin was at that time sitting in the study of the empress. "Of whom are you speaking?" he asked.

"Oh! always about the same vagrant, Batiushka; about that Italian vagabond."

Potemkin,—who really pitied Tarakanova, for two reasons: first, because she was a woman; and then, because she was the prey of Orloff, to him hateful,—began to speak in her favour. The empress, without a word, handed him a whole parcel of German and French newspapers, and

¹ *i.e.* "A good-for-nothing hussey."

then told him that he would do better to look and see for himself all the calumnies spread about her and this Pretender ; whereupon he, snuffling and grumbling, began to scan the papers with his short-sighted eyes.

“ Well ! ” asked Ekaterina, looking up from some papers she had been glancing at.

“ Incredible.—So much slander ! It’s difficult to give an opinion.”

“ To me, it’s all clear,” said Ekaterina. “ Just a second edition of the Marquis Pougachoff ; and you must agree, prince, with me, that it is impossible to have any pity for this ‘ victim,’ if you like, ‘ of foreign intrigues.’ ”

Galitzin received another order. He was to put down the impudence of the adventuress, especially, as in the words of the English ambassador, “ she was no princess, but the daughter of an innkeeper of Prague.”

The information of the ambassador regarding her was told to the Princess, at which she was very indignant.

“ If I only knew who slandered me thus,” she exclaimed furiously, “ I would scratch his eyes out.”

“ Good God ! what can all this mean ? ” she would cry out, horrified at her position. “ I so

ardently, so blindly believed in myself, in my mission. Can it be that they are right? Is it possible that under the load of these horrible proofs which are constantly cropping up, I shall have to bid adieu to all my convictions, to all my hopes? Never, that shall never be. I will rise above all; I will never give in!" That her pride might be taken down, the captive was treated much more severely. She was deprived for some time of the services of her maid, and of many other little comforts. Her food was much more simple, almost coarse; but all in vain. Neither prayers, nor threats to take away from her her own garments and furnish her with prison clothes could awaken any repentance in her, or extort from her the confession that she was an impostor and not a princess.

"I am not a pretender, do you hear?" she would scream in furious indignation to Galitzin. "You are a prince; I only a feeble woman. . . . In the name of the All-Merciful God, do not torment me; have pity upon me."

The prince, forgetting his orders, would begin consoling her.

"I am pregnant," inadvertently said the captive, crying. "I shall perish, but not alone. . . . Send me where you like—to the Eskimos, to the

snows of Siberia, to a convent. . . . No, on my word of honour, I'm innocent. . . .”

Galitzin became thoughtful.

“Who is the father of your unborn child?” he asked at last.

“Count Alexis Orloff.”

“Again a lie,” said Galitzin. “And why, what for? Are you not ashamed to answer like that? To a man whom the empress trusts so highly, to an old man?”

“It is only the truth. Before God!” answered the captive, sobbing. “The admiral, the officers, the whole fleet can bear witness to it. . . .”

The bewildered Galitzin put a stop to his interrogation, and sent a report of the new confession to the empress at Moscow.

* * * * *

“Miserable, impudent wretch!” screamed out Ekaterina, after reading this report to Potemkin. See how this new edition of Pougachoff, sent to us by the Poles—how she knows how to slander and calumniate others!”

“Well; but if there should be some truth in it,” slowly said Potemkin. “It's so easy to betray a poor, weak, confiding woman.”

“Oh, that's impossible!” answered Ekaterina. “At any rate, Orloff will soon be here. He'll

soon tell us all about this false Elizabeth. . . . And you, prince, in your knightly defence of a woman, do not forget the most important thing—the peace of the kingdom. We went through enough in the last insurrection."

Potemkin was silent.

From day to day Orloff was expected. He was hastening from Italy to be present at the celebration of the peace with Turkey. At this time Galitzin had received other orders,—to deprive the captive of everything except what was strictly necessary, to make her put on prison clothes, and having sent her maid away, to put two sentinels as a constant watch over her.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HISTORIOGRAPHER, MILLER.

THE obstinacy of the captive astonished and angered Ekaterina very much.

“How is this?” she reasoned. “I have conquered Turkey; Pougachoff has been caught, has acknowledged his imposture, and been publicly executed; . . . and that miserable, puny woman, that adventuress, . . . will not acknowledge anything, and dares to threaten me, from her cellar . . . from her den.”

Potemkin, after having heard from Christianok all the details of the arrest of the Princess, was very morose and silent. Ekaterina ascribed it to his frequent fits of melancholy.

Soon it became known to many of those about the empress, what means Orloff had employed to entice and then betray the unfortunate captive, and these were soon communicated to the empress through the medium of her maid Perekousikhin. At first Ekaterina would not believe any of these rumours, and severely repre-

manded her maid on this account. The secret report of the honest and incorruptible Galitzin concerning the position and condition of the captive, all the courtiers had made known to the empress. The womanly heart of Ekaterina was moved with indignation. "Not Radzivill," she said; "he, threatened with confiscation of his enormous estates, did not betray the devoted woman!"

"Betrayer by nature!" shot through the brain of Ekaterina, when she recollected the services of Orloff; . . . "ready for anything, unscrupulous in all; stopping at nothing in his own interests," and then Ekaterina remembered the phrase, "Matoushka Tzaritza, pardon. You didn't think, you did not guess—"¹

"Not for nothing do they call him butcher," contemptuously murmured Ekaterina. "Oh! he'll just say that, out of devotion, he 'oversalted it.' . . . Well! he'll soon be here. He must be made to mend that affair. That fallen one, without family, nameless, tribeless; a toy in the hands of the wicked, in his arms she'll be powerless. . . . And she, after selling beer at Prague, well! how dares she disdain Russian dignitary or count? Where's—the *mésalliance*?"

¹ Ekaterina is here referring to a letter of Orloff's.

The calm village scenes of Tzaritzin and Kolomenski, began to weary Ekaterina. The forests, the lakelets, the birds and the butterflies no longer brought her peaceful dreams.

The empress suddenly started for Moscow alone.

There, in the Chinese city, or Kitai-Gorod, she visited the archives of the Minister of the Interior, where several important papers had been sent for revision. The director of the archives was the celebrated author of the “History of Russia” and of “The Description of the Empire of Siberia;” late editor of the academical journal, “Monthly Compositions;” traveller and Russian historiographer;—the academician Miller. He was then already seventy. The empress herself was very fond of history, and knew him very well, having often had very long conversations with him about his works, and in general about history. She found him in his room, near the archives, busily turning over a heap of old Muscovite manuscripts.

Miller was very fond of flowers and birds. The rooms of his governmental department, not very lofty, were hung all around with cages of black-birds, bullfinches, and others of the feathered tribe, which quite deafened Ekaterina with their

loud whistling and twittering. A glass door opened from the study of the master of the house into another room, ornamented with large plants set in green tubs. The windows were open, but a net which covered them prevented the birds, which were flying about, from taking their departure. The neat and pretty, although simple, room was filled with the perfume of roses and heliotropes. The greatest cleanliness reigned everywhere. The floors were as polished as a mirror. Miller was writing at his table near the glass door leading to his aviary. The empress, passing by, motioned the officious servant away, and came up to him unnoticed.

“I have come to you, Gerard Feodorovitch, with a request,” said Ekaterina, on entering the room.

Miller jumped up, apologising for his morning costume.

“Command me, your Majesty,” said he, hastily arranging his dress, and searching with his eyes for his spectacles, which he missed.

The empress took a seat, invited him to do the same, and the conversation began.

“Is it true,” she began, after having made several gracious inquiries after his health, and that of his large family, “is it true?—it is said

that you have collected evidence, that you are convinced that it was not a usurper, a pretender who ascended the throne of Moscow; that Grishka Otropieff was the real Tzarevitch Dimitri? You said something about it—to the English traveller, Cox."

The good-natured, absent-minded Miller, always lost in his researches, was very much puzzled at this question of the empress.

"Where on earth could she have heard that?" thought he. "Could Cox have blundered it out?"

"Let us be candid; I'll help you," continued Ekaterina. "You possess a wonderful memory, and withal you are so very perspicacious in deciphering and comparing manuscripts. Give me openly and boldly your opinion. We are alone; no one can hear us. Is it true that the evidence for the condemnation of the Pretender was weak, almost nothing?"

Miller became thoughtful. His grey hair was ruffled, and his good-natured, intelligent mouth, which just before the entrance of the empress had held a half-finished cigar in an amber mouth-piece, was now unconsciously nervously twitching.

"Yes, it is true," he answered, hesitating;

“ but, excuse me, that is quite my own personal opinion, nothing more.”

“ But if so, then why do you not publish such a very important judgment ? ”

“ But, your Majesty,” stammered Miller, looking about him with a bewildered gaze, pulling at his waistcoat, “ I read the account of the researches made by Vassili Shouiski at Ouglitch. He made those researches by order of Godounoff. It was to his interest to please Boris, and he did this by bringing to him the evidence only of those who affirmed that the Tzarevitch had really been killed. Of course, any one can see that all other evidence which might have been disagreeable to Godounoff he would suppress.”

“ Which other ? ” asked Ekaterina.

“ That another one was killed, and that the former was hidden ; but of course, you know yourself, that this very same Shouiski publicly acknowledged the resuscitated Dimitri.”

“ A very witty proof,” said Ekaterina. “ Not for nothing does General Potemkin, great amateur historian, advise me to have all that published, if you are really convinced of its truth ? ”

“ Excuse me, your Majesty,” stammered Miller ; “ the will of the empress—is an impor-

tant guide ; but there's another, a power still higher—Russia. I am a Lutheran ; the body of the recognised Dimitri lies in the cathedral of the Kremlin. What would become of all my researches, what would become of my own person, amidst your own nation, if I dared to assert that not Grishka Otropieff had ascended the Muscovite throne, but the real Tzarevitch Dimitri ? ”

CHAPTER XX.

MILLER'S REPLY.

THE words of Miller disturbed Ekaterina very much.

“Well, candid at any rate,” thought she; “just like a philosopher.”

“Very well,” said the empress; “let the dead rest in peace; we will talk about the living. I think General Potemkin has sent you the examination, and the evidence taken in respect of that impudent Pretender, the arrest of whom you have heard about, I suppose?”

“Yes, he sent them,” answered Miller, remembering at last that the spectacles for which he had been constantly searching with his eyes were on his forehead, and wondering how he could have forgotten that.

“Well, and what have you to say of that worthy sister of the Marquis Pougachoff?” asked Ekaterina.

Miller at that very moment caught sight, through the glass door, of one of his canaries, a very quarrelsome bird, who had just flown

into another's nest, the mistress of which was twittering, flying round, and trying to turn her out. His eyes also wandered to a sick blackbird with its leg bound up.

Miller, recollecting himself, and colouring at his own timidity and absent-mindedness, answered,—

“The Princess, if she is Russian, learnt Russian history very insufficiently; that's the main thing I have to say, after reading her papers; but of course, that would be more her teacher's fault.”

“Well, what do you think? Can it be that there is a spark of truth in her tale?” asked Ekaterina. “Do you suppose for one moment that the Empress Elizabeth might have had such a daughter, and hidden her from all eyes?”

Miller was just on the point of answering: “Oh! yes, of course; what is there in all that so very improbable?” but he remembered at that minute about the mysterious youth, Alexis Shkourin, travelling now in foreign parts, and in his confusion fixed his eyes on the glass door of his aviary.

“Well, and why do you not answer?” said Ekaterina, smiling. “Your Lutheranism does not stand in the way here.”

“Well, everything is possible, your Majesty,”

said Miller, shaking his grey curly head. “ People do say all sorts of things ; some of them may be true.”

“ Look here—would it not be strange ? ” said Ekaterina. “ The late Razoumovski was a very good man, and although secretly, still he was the lawful, husband of Elizabeth. Why trample under foot all the laws of nature ? Why this heartless denial of their own daughter ? ”

“ Then it was one century, now it’s another,” answered Miller. “ Morals differ ; if the new Shouiski-Shouvalovi could hide for so many years in solitary confinement the, to them, dangerous Prince John, proclaimed in his infancy emperor, what is there here so very strange, if, in their thirst after influence and power, they should have sent to the end of the earth, or, at any rate, hidden another infant, this unfortunate Princess ? ”

“ But, Gerard Feodorovitch, you forget the most important thing—the mother ! How could the empress have borne that ? You cannot deny her heart was in the right place ; and then, all this was not about a strange child, like Ivanushka, but about her own forsaken daughter.”

“ Well ! oh, it is very simple,” answered Miller. “ Razoumovski, I should think, had nothing at all to do with it. The whole intrigue

was brought to bear on the empress—not on the mother. . . . Very likely, many reasons were brought forward, and she consented. This secret daughter was hidden, sent to the South, and then over the Urals. In the papers of the Princess she speaks of poison, of flight from Siberia to Persia, afterwards to Germany, and then to France. . . . The Shouiskis of our days have repeated the old tragedy. In guarding the empress, they still kept in readiness for any emergency, a new refugee, saved by them from another world."

Ekaterina here remembered that Orloff, in one of his letters, had spoken of a Russian traveller, Ivan Shouvaloff, who was even now in foreign parts.

"With you, one might go on talking for ever," said Ekaterina, rising. "Your memory in itself is a whole archive, and a priceless one, too; and Russian history, is it not true? like Russia itself, is richest virgin-soil. How lovely our boundless corn-fields! But then, again, the weeds. Ah, *à propos!* I do always admire your flowers and your birds. Now, do pay me a visit at Tzaritzin. Grimme has sent me a whole family of the loveliest cockatoos. One of them is always repeating '*où est la vérité?*'"

Having with special graciousness thanked Miller for his information, the empress returned to the palace. Soon after this event, the hero of Chesma, Orloff, made his appearance.

Alexis Gregorevitch failed to recognise the court. With new faces, a new order of things had been introduced. The count did not at once receive the honour of an interview with the empress. He was told she was not quite well. This made him feel very anxious. Well versed in court life, he scented disfavour in the air. It became urgent to take measures. Very diffidently, Alexis Gregorevitch turned to some of the courtiers to try and get an audience with the new sun, Potemkin. The interview took place with great politeness on both sides, but no geniality. Their old friendship and fraternity had been left far behind. They conversed till midnight, but the guest felt he had learnt very little.

“Yes, now it’s all without measure, all overflowing,” said Potemkin *en passant*, speaking about something. Orloff long pondered over those words. “Overflowing!”—well, had not he also filled the measure too full?

In the morning he was invited to go to the empress, whom he found bathing her dogs.

“Sir Tom Anderson,” who had already been taken out of the bath and wiped dry, was warming himself under his coverlet. His consort, “Mimi,” was still in the water. Ekaterina sat near, holding ready the warm coverlet. Perekoushkin, in a large apron, her sleeves rolled up to the elbows, was very energetically rubbing the little dog with a sponge and soap. Quite wet, and white from the soap, Mimi, on seeing the big goggle-eyed stranger, began barking most furiously and straining to get at him.

“Ah! from water to water,” said Ekaterina jokingly. “Welcome back to your native land. We shall soon be ready.”

Having wrapped Mimi up warmly and put her in the basket, the empress dried her hands, and remarked:—

“As you see, friends first of all!” She took a seat, pointed out a chair to Orloff, and began questioning him about his journeys, about Italy, and the Turkish affairs.

“But, oh! Batiushka Alexis Gregorevitch, you oversalted, oversalted it,” said the empress, producing her snuff-box, and slowly taking a pinch.

“In what, your Majesty?”

“In that certain little affair,” smilingly

answered Ekaterina, menacing him with her finger.

Orloff noticed the smile, but at the same time, in that very same joke, he noticed a well-known —to him—bad sign. The round, strong chin of Ekaterina trembled slightly.

“In what? Matoushka Tzaritza, and in what is my crime?” he asked, stammering.

“*Comment donc, Monsieur?* Yes, really oversalted it,” continued Ekaterina, slowly taking another pinch from her snuff-box.

At this, Orloff, like a child, lost all self-possession; his eyes wandered timorously round the room.

“You know; our captive,” said the empress, —“Oh, I suppose you’ve heard it; she’ll soon be two. . . .”

The athlete Orloff knew not what to do in his confusion.

“I am lost, completely lost!” thought he; and his disgrace, his downfall arose before his eyes. “Mercy, oh God!”

“But that we may arrange, matters may be mended,” continued Ekaterina. “You might go to Petersburg, see the captive. To celebrate the peace, you have returned to her as her bridegroom.”

Orloff knit his brows, bent one knee to the ground, kissed the hand that was held out to him, and silently left the room. At the door, he regained his self-composure.

“Well! what! the empress! What did she say?” asked the courtiers.

“I have been honoured with a special invitation to the fêtes,” answered the count, “and now I am going to Petersburg to arrange my brother’s affairs.”

Count Orloff tried to seem very elated, very proud. . . . He understood that it was better for him to make haste. It was clear that the empress was not joking. Under pretence of an interview with his brother, he hastened the preparations for his journey, and was soon on his way to Petersburg.

CHAPTER XXI.

ORLOFF AND THE PRINCESS.

WORN out with her long sea voyage and imprisonment, the captive dragged on a miserable existence in the fortress. An acute fever, a sharp cough, accompanied by frequent hemorrhage, had developed into rapid consumption.

The frequent visits and questions of the field-marshall Galitzin always threw the Princess into fits of passion.

“What right have you to treat me like this?” she would say in an imperative voice. “What reason have I given for such treatment?”

“Written orders from a higher power—the will of the empress!” answered, panting and puffing, the secretary, Oushakoff.

In the capacity of secretary to the Commission which had been appointed, he had large means placed at his disposal. Therefore, continually complaining of fatigue, of a mass of occupations, and even of pains in his spine, he lingered over the evidence, brought forward a multitude of

facts, began a long correspondence about her affairs, and in general led the good-natured Galitzin by the nose, and on the savings made from the money allotted for the keep of the captive managed to buy a nice little house in the courtyard already belonging to him in the Gorokhoviya.¹

In the interval, the false testament found among the papers of Tarakanova was shown to her.

“Well, what have you to say to that?” asked Galitzin.

“I swear by the Almighty God, by eternal damnation, that I am the author of none of those unfortunate papers. I was told all that.”

“But they are in your own handwriting.”

“Perhaps—it interested me.”

“Then you do not wish to confess to anything, or explain the truth?”

“I’ve nothing to confess. I lived in freedom, I did harm to no one. I was betrayed, made prisoner by treason.”

Galitzin began to lose patience. “What a she-devil they’ve handed over to me!” thought he. “Extract a secret from a stone like that!” The prince groaned aloud and rubbed his nose.

¹ A street in St. Petersburg.

“But, your Grace, recollect,” once whispered the officious Oushakoff, “your hands are unfettered. In the last ukase it makes mention of the utmost severity, of investigation without partiality.”

“Well, of course, one might try,” muttered the bewildered prince, who was in general averse to any severe measure. “Shall I try? It won’t be worse than it is.”

“In the name of the empress,” severely said the field-marshall to the commandant, in the presence of the captive, “in view of her obstinacy —deprive her of everything, except the strictly necessary clothing and bedding. You hear, everything—books, and other things, there; and then, if that does not answer, put her on common prison food.”

The orders of the prince were carried out. The poor, ailing girl, brought up in luxury and comfort, began to receive nothing but black bread, soldier’s *kasha* (porridge), and *schi* (sour cabbage soup). Although hungry, she would sit for hours shedding bitter tears over the wooden bowl, but not touching it. On the way to Russia, near the shores of Holland, where the squadron had anchored to take in provisions, she had read in a newspaper, which had fallen by accident into

her cabin, all the past life of Orloff, and trembling with passion, she had cursed her folly in having believed in such a man. But worse misery awaited her. Two soldiers were assigned to the captive, and kept watch in her room, night and day. All this would throw the prisoner into fits of passion.

“Repent,” Galitzin would say to her. “I pity you from my heart, but without repentance, don’t expect forgiveness.”

“I’ll accept every torment, even death, Sir Marshal; I’ll accept everything,” said the captive. “But you are mistaken. . . . Nothing can make me withdraw my evidence.”

“Think over it. . . .”

“God is my witness. . . . My torments will fall on the heads of my tormentors.”

“She’ll think over it, your Grace!” whispered Oushakoff, turning over some papers. “One more experiment. She’ll come round all right.”

The experiment was tried. Her Venetian silk nightdress was exchanged for one of sackcloth.

“Almighty God! be witness of my most secret thoughts,” prayed the captive. “What am I to do, what shall I undertake? I believed in my past. It all seemed so plain. I was accustomed to think of it all, to live in that idea. Neither

the treason of that monster, nor my captivity, has been able to shake my conviction. No, and not even this iron dungeon, which seems to crush me, can do that. Death is not far off. Oh ! Mother of God, oh ! lowly Jesus, help me. Who will give me strength, who will guide me, who will save me—from all these horrors, from this prison ? ”

* * * * *

One cold rainy evening, a hired carriage with the blinds drawn down drove up to the *perron* of the commandant of the fortress of Petropavlovski, André Gavrilovitch Tchernishoff. Half an hour afterwards, Orloff and the commandant walked in the direction of the Ravelin Alexéef.

“ Failing,” said the commandant, walking on, “ failing rapidly, especially with this dampness. Yesterday, your Grace, she begged for her own clothes and books ; they were returned to her.”

The sentinels were called out of the room of the Princess. Orloff entered the room alone. Tchernishoff remained outside the door. In the dusk, the count could hardly see the low-ceilinged room, with two deeply set windows with thick iron gratings. Between the two windows stood a small table with two chairs. A few books were scattered on the table together with some other

things, and, covered with a coarse cloth, stood the untouched food. On the right-hand side stood a screen. Behind the screen was a small table with a water-bottle, a glass, and a cup, and surrounded by chintz curtains, a small iron bedstead. On the bed, in a white dressing gown and cap, lay a girl, so pale, one might think she was dead, covered with a blue velvet mantilla.

Orloff was struck by the frail look of her, who such a short time ago had been so stately, and so charmingly beautiful. There flashed across his mind remembrances of Italy, tender letters, the ardent courtship, the journey to Livorno, the feast on the ship, Ribas and Christianok travestied in the old clerical vestments. “Oh! why did I play that comedy with the marriage ceremony?” thought he. “She was really on board my ship, in my hands.” And vividly there flashed through his mind the picture of the arrest of the Princess. He remembered her cries on deck, and the next day his message to her through Konsov, a letter in German, describing his own false sorrow, oaths of faithfulness till death, and assurances of love. “What sorrow has fallen upon us”—trying to write the most tender words, he had said. “We are both arrested, in chains; but God, the All-merciful, will not forsake us. Let us put our trust

in Him. As soon as I get my liberty, I'll search the whole world till I find you, to guard and serve you all my life." "And I have found her; here she is!" thought Orloff, involuntarily shuddering, not daring to cross the threshold. At last he ventured near her, close to the screen. At the sound, the unfortunate girl opened her eyes, looked at her visitor, and rose. Her auburn hair, at one time so luxuriant, fell from under her cap, and half-covered her poor pale face, distorted by illness and passion.

"You? You—in this room—near me!" screamed out the Princess, recognising her visitor, and stretching out both her hands in front of her, as though driving away some awful apparition.

Orloff stood motionless.

CHAPTER XXII.

ORLOFF'S INTERVIEW WITH THE PRINCESS.

THE words seemed to burst from her throat, and die upon her lips. She threw herself back on the bed to the farthest side of the wall, where with flaming eyes she looked ready to devour Orloff, who stood gazing at her horror-stricken.

“ Yes! we are married, are we not? Ha, ha, ha! we are man and wife ?” said she, but a convulsive cough cut short her indignation for the moment. “ Where have you been all this time? *You promised, I waited.*”

“ Look here,” gently said Orloff, “ let us forget the past, let us play comedy no longer. You must realize by this time that I was the faithful slave of my sovereign, and that I only obeyed her commands.”

“ Treachery, deceit !” screamed the unhappy girl; “ never will I believe it. . . . Do you hear me? The great and powerful Russian empress would never have had recourse to such perfidy.”

“ I swear to you they were her orders. . . .”

“No, I do not believe one word of it, traitor,” screamed the unfortunate girl, shaking her fists at him. “Ekaterina could command anything—demand my surrender, burn down the town that gave me refuge, take me by force, but not that. But *you*, you yourself, might have pierced me with a dagger, poisoned me. You knew of poisons,—but what have you done with me? what?”

“One moment of calmness, I implore you,” at last said Orloff. “Answer me one word, only one—and I promise you, on my word of honour, that you shall be set free immediately.

“What new invention is that, monster? Speak, traitor,” said the Princess, recovering some composure, as shudderingly she drew the blue mantilla, so well known to the count, closer around her.

“You have been questioned so long, and with such persistency,” began Orloff, trying to give his voice a tender and convincing tone, “tell me now all—we are alone; God only can see and hear us.”

“*Gran Dio!*” said the unfortunate girl, “he invokes the name of God,” added she, raising her eyes to the image of the Saviour which hung on the wall over the head of her bed; “he! Very



*Peter created Russia,
Catherine gave her a soul!*

likely you have arranged this slow torture, this torment! and yet you boasted that torture was abolished here. The empress, I am sure, knows nothing of all this. In this matter she has been deceived, as in everything else."

"Be calm, be calm. . . . Tell me, who are you?" continued Orloff; "hide nothing. I'll implore the empress; she will be merciful to you and to me. . . ."

"*Diavolo!* he asks, 'Who am I!'" she stammered, half stifled by a new fit of anger. "But cannot you see I have done with the world? I am dying; then to what end all this?" She again began to cough most awfully, and leaning her head against the wall, was silent.

"There,—she'll die without having confessed anything," thought Orloff, as he stood by her.

"In riches and in happiness," said she, coming to herself, "in humiliation and in prison, I repeat constantly the same thing—and you know it well. I am the daughter of your late empress," proudly said she, rising. "Do you hear me, miserable, wretched slave, I am your born grand-duchess. . . ." A bold idea flashed through Orloff's mind. . . . "Ah! what's in a word?" thought he; "she won't live long, and at one stroke I'll please them both."

He bent on one knee, grasped the frail pale hand of the captive, and ardently pressed it to his lips.

“Your Highness!” stammered he. “Elise! pardon, I swear—yes, I am guilty,—but those were the orders. I myself was arrested. Only now have I received my liberty. . . .”

The poor girl raised her big, astonished eyes to his face, covering her mouth with her hand-kerchief to stop the blood.

“I implore you, I promise you, we will be really solemnly married,” continued Orloff. “You shall be my wife—and then, your Highness—my darling, . . . my own Elise, rank, riches, faithfulness, life-long devotion. . . .”

“Out! away! monster!” screamed the captive, jumping up. “This bruised hand princes, kings sought—it’s not for you to touch it, branded traitor, inquisitor.”

“Well, she doesn’t choose her words,” thought to himself the Commandant Tchernishoff, who, standing outside the door, could easily hear the French abuses and the curses of the prisoner; “better take myself off. If the count knows all this has been heard, his little vanity will be pricked, and it is just possible he may take his revenge.” The commandant walked off.

The jailer, standing in the long corridor, with his keys, and also hearing the, to him, quite unintelligible cries, the stamping of feet, and, as it seemed to him, the noise of things being thrown at the visitor, also walked off into a corner, thinking to himself: "Ha, ha, Maimzoulka (Mademoiselle), it seems, is asking for better food; it seems it's not in the articles. She's screaming at the general, oho! Of course it's not for such as she, so thin, to eat *schi* and *schi*. Yesterday, for the first time, they gave her milk." The furious screams continued. Then came the sound of broken glass. The door of the dungeon was flung open rapidly, and Orloff, humbly bending under the door, too low for his tall person, came out. His face was purple; he lingered for a moment in the corridor, and stared about him, as if collecting his thoughts. Having felt under his arm for his cocked hat, passed his fingers through his hair, and pulled down his coat, he briskly and smartly drew himself up, and silently walked out in the pouring rain, jumped into the carriage, and shouted to the coachman, "Général Procureur."

As he left the fortress behind him, Orloff began turning over in his mind the details of the last interview.

“Well, she *is* a serpent, a viper !” he whispered to himself, looking out into the streets from the carriage window; “didn’t she sting !”

Very reservedly, and with plenty of self-composure, he entered the house of the Prince Alexander Alexéevitch Viazimski. It was already late. The candles were lighted. Orloff shivered, and rubbed his hands together.

“Take a seat,” said the général procureur. “What ! cold ?”

“Yes, prince, a little.”

Viazimski ordered a servant to bring in liqueurs. The servant soon came, bringing a lovely decanter, and a silver basket containing ginger biscuits.

“Pray help yourself, count. . . . Well ! what about our usurper ?” continued the général procureur, putting aside some papers that he had just been looking over.

“Impudent beyond all bounds ; still persists” answered Count Alexis, pouring himself out a wineglassful of the rich liqueur, and raising it first to his nose, and then to his lips.

“Well, of course !” said the prince ; “she has no wish to part with her so-called titles and rights cheaply.”

“Oh ! she’ll give plenty of trouble yet ; other measures than those are wanted,” said Orloff.

“ But what others, Batienka ? Her last minutes are drawing near. . . . You would not have her strangled ? ”

“ And why not ? ” whispered Orloff, as if to himself, dipping a biscuit into a fresh glass of liqueur. “ Pity for such like ! ”

The général procureur threw a side-long glance from behind the green *abat-jour* on his visitor. “ And you’re not joking, Alexis Gregorevitch ? It’s your advice ? ”

“ Oh ! for the good of my country, and like a true patriot—not only would I advise, but very much recommend,” answered Orloff, walking backwards and forwards, munching the sweet melting biscuits.

“ *Mais, c’est un assassin dans l’âme !* ” thought to himself the great judge,¹ whose personal appearance was austere and generally gloomy, as he listened in horror to the soft, cat-like tread of Orloff on the carpet; “ *c’est en lui comme une mauvaise habitude !* ”

Orloff took out his eye-glass, and, biting a fresh biscuit, began to admire a picture of Psyche and Cupid on the wall.

“ Whence came this picture ? ” asked he.

¹ The général procureur is the highest authority in legal matters.

“It is a gift from the empress. . . . Count, when do you think of returning to Moscow?”

“To-morrow morning. I shall not of course delay my information, but shall instantly report the fresh obstinacy of that impudent liar.”

Viazimski knit his bushy eyebrows. “Do you know anything about the information of the prisoner on your own account?” he grunted out, turning over some papers.

Orloff let drop his half-eaten biscuit.

“Yes! Now, just fancy; you’ll not deny all this is disgusting. My faithfulness, devotion, honour, she has spared nothing. . . . And let me tell you what is more astonishing than everything else, that that she-devil fell over head and ears in love with me, and invented, goodness knows what; but even just now the hussy has had the impudence to bid me acknowledge a marriage with her.”

“Well! I can only wonder,” said Viazimski; “that disguise in clerical vestments—excuse me, what need for such sacrilege? Oh! you’ll have a deal to answer for, to God, Batiushka Count. . . . All that would haunt me.”

Orloff tried to turn it all off as a joke, tried to go on talking, but the gloomy silence of the bear-like Procureur showed him that his credit at

court had been long on the decline, and that he, notwithstanding his late services, might, like useless old rubbish, hope for only one thing—to be left alone and forgotten.

“My annals are finishing, it seems. I shall soon be at the bottom of the river,” thought Orloff, on leaving Viazimski. “They’ll put me under hatches somewhere in Moscow, or perhaps farther. We are grown old, out of fashion; we must clear the way for new-comers.”

He was so much disturbed by his reception at the procureur’s that the next morning he had a special service celebrated in the Church of the Holy Virgin Mary, and before his departure for Moscow he even paid a visit to an Armenian fortune-teller on the Litienaya.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ORLOFF AT MOSCOW.

THE peace with Turkey was publicly celebrated at Moscow on July 13th. Galitzin was not forgotten, and, for having cleared Moldavia of the Turks, received from Petersburg a rich sword studded with diamonds. Orloff received a testimonial, a rich dinner service, one of the Imperial properties near Petersburg, and the title of “Chesmenski.”

“Put up on the shelves of the archives, wholly thrown over!” thought Alexis Gregorevitch. He was not allowed to follow the court to Petersburg. From this time Moscow was assigned to him as a residence, as also to many of the other supporters of Ekaterina. It would have seemed that the days of Chesmenski flowed on peacefully and pleasantly in his splendid Muscovite palace; but the retainers of the count began to notice that he often had fits of melancholy—that very often, without any reason whatever, he would have fun-

ral masses celebrated, or a special service with *Acathistus*,¹ or would call in the gipsy fortunetellers, and they would hear him often murmur and complain of the “Traitress Fortune,” who in former times had so spoilt him with her favours.

If Count Alexana would drive out his fleet steeds on a beautiful frosty evening, flying along the streets, glancing at the passers-by from under his rich fur cap, thickly studded with frosty diamonds, his thoughts would carry him back to other blue, but warm skies, to the azure shores of the Morea and the Adriatic, to the Roman and Venetian marble palaces. If in autumn the sleet were driving, promising a splendid hunt, the count would ride in the neighbourhood of Otradi or Niaskouchnovo, and, after having driven the mother hare out of the birch copse, and started his favourite harehounds on her track, would gallop on his gallant Kabardinetz furiously in pursuit, but all at once he would rein in his steed and stop. The rain might brush the wet branches of the birch in his face, the horse might splash through the pools and mud, but the count’s thoughts had wandered far away, to that far-off Italy, to Rome, Livorno, to the unfortunate, by him betrayed, Tarakanova.

¹ A service in honour of our Lord and the Virgin Mary.

“Where is she? What has become of her?” he would think. “Has she survived her child’s birth? Is she still there, or have they hidden her even farther away?”

After the fall of the favourite, Prince Gregory, his brother, Count Alexis Chesmenski, retired so quickly from court that he not only knew nothing positive, but even dared not try to know anything positive about the unfortunate beauty whom he had carried off and betrayed.

That same year, in autumn, rumours were spread in Moscow that a very important mysterious personage had been brought over from Petersburg, and sequestered in the Novo Spaski Nunnery; that she had been compelled to take the veil, and had been named Docifé,¹ and was now locked up in a secluded cell.

The Muscovites whispered loudly that the new nun was the daughter of the late Empress Elizabeth, by her secret husband Razoumovski.

What emotions the count underwent, are only known to himself.

“It is she! it is she!” he would murmur in his agitation, not knowing that his victim, the

¹ “Docifé” is supposed to have been another daughter of Elizabeth Petrowna. It is known that she died in the nunnery referred to.

Princess Tarakanova, still hopelessly languished in the fortress. "It can be no one else; of course not. She has renounced everything, she has submitted, she has taken the veil."

Thoughts of the newly-arrived captive troubled him so much that he even avoided driving in the street where the convent was, and if this were impossible, he would avoid looking up at the windows.

"Traitor, murderer!" would resound in his ears, on recollecting his last interview with the Princess. In bitter anguish he would remember every detail of that interview, when she had loaded him with curses, stamped at him, spat in his face, and passionately flung at him whatever came near her hand. Once, when the Prince Volkonski had paid him an unofficial visit, to see over his stables and horses, Chesmenski tried to bring the conversation round to the Princess. They had returned from their walk to the stables, and were taking tea. The count began in a round-about way to refer to foreign and home news, and rumours, and then, as if merely *en passant*, asked who the person was whom report said had been brought to the convent?

"Why do you ask that?" suddenly interrupted the prince, Michael Nikititch.

“What?” asked the bewildered Chesmenski.

“Nothing!” answered Volkonski, turning round, and looking aimlessly out of the window. “I was just recollecting a little Petersburg incident, that happened last year at Court.

“What incident? Honour me, Batiushka Prince!” said the count, with a smile and a bow. “You see, here I hear nothing and see nothing of the new, curious, and to us very often incomprehensible occurrences in the court regions?”

“Well! as you please,” said Volkonski, clearing his throat, and continuing to gaze out of the window. “The incident, if you like, is not very important, rather comical than otherwise. You know the wife of the General Major Kojin? Marie Dimitrievna, who is so lively, so beautiful and such a chatterbox?”

“Oh, of course, who does not know her? I often used to meet her, before my departure for foreign parts.”

“Well! you know, she babbled out, it is said, somewhere . . . that some one . . . well! we’ll call them the Abaloshoffs, it’s all the same, I’ve forgotten who—had decided on patronising the new lucky man, Peter Modrvinoff. . . . Of course you know.”

Orloff silently inclined his head.

“ Patronise . . . well ! you understand, trip him up. . . .”

“ Who ? ” asked Orloff.

“ Well ! it would seem Gregory Alexandrovitch Potemkin.”

“ Well ! and what then ? ”

“ Well ! this,” continued the prince. “ In somebody’s private rooms, Stephan Ivanovitch Sheshkovski was hurriedly called, and the following orders were given :—‘ Batiushka, go immediately, this very minute, to the masquerade, find out the *Generalsha* Kojin. Having found her, carry her off to the secret department, and having given her a slight taste of corporal punishment, as a small token of remembrance, bring back the aforesaid little lady, with all honour, and deliver her safely over to the masquerade.”

“ And Sheshkovski ? ”

“ Well ! he took the little lady, whipped her soundly, and brought her back, with all honour, to the masquerade, and she, that no one should get a hint of this curious little incident, said nothing, and very wisely and assiduously went through all the dances to which she had been invited—every one to the last—minuet, *cotillon*, and all.”

Orloff understood well the bitter allusion, and never mentioned Docifé again.

Neither did the count find any pleasure in his conversations with his intendant, Terentitch Cabanoff, who sometimes used to come from Krenova to Niaskouchnovo. Terentitch was a serf, but knew how to read and write. He was always dressed in the latest fashion, with a pearl-grey *kaftan*¹ and waistcoat, shoes with huge steel buckles, ruffles, and a black silk purse² to his powdered pigtail.

The count would pour out for him a goblet of rich foreign wine, saying, “Taste that, old fellow. . . . It’s not wine I’ve poured out, it’s a man’s life, . . . elixir.” Terentitch would refuse.

“No! No nonsense, old man!” would press the count. “Don’t forget the proverb, ‘Enjoy life while it lasts.’ Be merry, in that alone lies happiness. Unfortunately, not for all.”

“Too true, Batiushka Count!” would answer Cabanoff, drinking off the goblet. “We, well! we are but serfs; . . . but you, ought you to sigh, ought you not to enjoy sweet life in your

¹ A Persian coat.

² A fine black silk net as worn in England about the time of George II. and George III.

own lovely, beautiful manors? The sites are so dry, so gay, the sloping fields are so fruitful; springs of water, forests, groves, everywhere. The serfs so industrious, so hardy, no beggars, thanks to you, our benefactor. We have noticed long ago, sir, that you are always very sad, and have heard something now and then which makes us all very anxious."

"Doubt and suspicion, my dear fellow, will constantly exist," answered the count. "Last autumn, you yourself wrote to me, when I was in foreign parts, praising the coming crops, and how did they turn out? to be of no account at all? No, the proverb says, 'Don't count your chickens before they're hatched!'"

"Yes, it's the truth you're saying," answered Terentitch, sighing.

"And in all other things," continued the count. "I go about a great deal, and many come to me, and, would you believe it? I know nothing of what I used to know before. Phylia was high in favour, every one sought his patronage, but now, . . ." the count was silent and thoughtful.

"See there!" thought Cabanoff, looking at him, "with that strength, those riches, to be thus slighted."

"Ah! yes, old man," continued Orloff, "hard

times are come. I feel as if between two mill-stones. My services are ended; no one requires them any more, and here, at home, there is nothing but *ennui*."

"Count, fire purifies gold," answered Terentitch, "misfortune, man. Wood won't burn without shavings. . . . I might look out for some for you."

"What?"

"Get married, your Grace."

"Oh! well, prate about that to others, but not to me," answered Chesmenski, remembering that Konsov had given him the same advice not long before.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PRINCESS WRITES TO THE EMPRESS.

MEANWHILE, the position of the Princess Tarakanova had remained the same. During the celebration of the peace with Turkey, in Moscow, she had been forgotten. However, when all had become quiet again, new points of condemnation were found against her. She was again cross-examined. Even Sheshkovski was called, and let loose on her, and the cross-examinations were more frequent. Worn out by her illness and mental anguish, as well as by her miserable and unusual surroundings, and by the presence of the two sentinels in her room, she began fading rapidly. There were even days when her end was expected every minute. After one of these terrible days, the unfortunate captive seized a pen, and wrote a letter to the empress.

“Snatching myself from the arms of death,” she wrote, “I throw myself at your feet. You ask, who I am? but can the fact of birth be

made a crime of, for any one? Night and day men are in my room. My sufferings are such that my whole being is shaken. In refusing me mercy, it's not to me alone you refuse it." The empress was very much troubled that she could not leave Moscow herself and personally see the captive, who excited in her by turns the deepest anger, and, involuntarily, the most profound pity.

In the month of August, Field-Marshal Galitzin paid the Princess another visit.

" You called yourself a Persian. Then you said you were born in Arabia; you gave yourself out next as a Tcherkeshenka; and at last as our grand-duchess," he said. " You stated that you knew the Oriental languages; we gave your letters to persons who know those languages, but they could make nothing out of them. Is it possible—excuse me—that this is also deceit on your part?"

" Oh! how stupid all that is!" answered Tarakanova, with a contemptuous smile, and again coughing. " Do Persians and Arabs teach their wives to read or write? In my childhood I learnt a little by myself, and therefore I ought to be believed more than your readers."

Galitzin was too sorry for her to go on

questioning her on all the points written down by Oushakoff.

“Look here,” said he, dashing away a tear, seeming to recollect something which was a great deal more serious and important, “there’s no time for disputes now . . . your strength is failing you. . . . I have not received permission; yet I will give orders for you to be transferred into a better and more spacious apartment, and your food shall be brought you from the table of the commandant. . . . Would you not like a priest . . . you understand . . . we are all in the hands of God . . . to prepare you . . . for . . .”

“For death . . . is it not true?” interrupted the captive, shaking her head.

“Yes!” answered Galitzin.

“Yes, I feel myself it is true.”

“Whom would you like?” asked the prince, leaning over her. “A Catholic, a Protestant, or one of our own faith?”

“I am Russian,” said the Princess, “therefore send me one of our own faith, if you please.”

“So, everything is finished!” thought she the next night, sleepless as always; “darkness without dawn, anguish without end, death . . . there it comes. It will soon be here, soon—

perhaps to-morrow. And they're not yet tired of questioning. . . .”

The captive arose, leaned her head on the side of the bed. “But who am I after all? she asked herself, raising her eyes to the image of the Saviour. “Is it so difficult to sum up everything in these my last minutes? Perhaps.—Is it possible that I am not really the one I thought myself to be? No, I do not acknowledge that! But why not? Is it from a feeling of disgust towards them, or from too great a passion; or is it revenge for a name disgraced, for a woman crushed?”

And then she tried again to remember all her past, to recollect its smallest details. Days long past crowded her memory. Her luxurious gay life, her successes, her triumphs, her visits and her levées, her balls. “Courtiers, *diplomâts*, counts, even reigning princes; how many adorers I have had,” thought she. “There must have been some reason why they should all have courted me so, offered me their hearts, their riches, sought my hand. . . . For what? for my beauty, for my power of pleasing, for my talents? But there are many beautiful, talented women far more wily than I; why did not the Prince Limbourgski go mad over them? Why did he not give

them, as he gave me, his lands, his castles? Why didn't he make these over to them instead of to me, as 'granted' estates? Why only to me did all the 'Radzivils' and 'Pototskis' cling? Even the powerful favourite of the Russian Court, Shouvaloff, sought an interview with me. Why was I surrounded with such profound, almost devotional respect? Why was my past history so eagerly searched out? Yes, I was selected by Providence for some special end, of which I myself am ignorant.

"Childhood!—there alone lies the key to it all," whispered the poor captive, grasping at her earliest recollections; "there alone lie the proofs."

But it was just that very childhood which was so bewildering to her own mind. She recollected the isolated hamlet somewhere in the South, in a desert, the large shady trees, the low cottage, the kitchen garden, and beyond, the boundless fields. A good, kind old woman dressed and took care of her. Then came the journey in the comfortably balanced cart, filled with fresh, perfumed hay, other boundless fields, rivers, mountains, forests. "But who am I?" she would cry in anguish, sobbing and striking her poor senseless head! "They want proofs!—but where are these to

be found? What can I add to what I have already said? How can I myself separate the truth from the fiction which life has mixed up together? And how could a poor, weak, deserted, helpless child know that one day she would be called to account for her own birth? The judgment concerning me is unjust, illegal. It's not for me to help to convince my persecutors. Let them disgrace me; let them hunt me down; let them finish their work; I am not answerable, either for my birth, or for my name. . . . I am the only living witness of my past; there is no other. Why are they so furious? God does many wonders. Is it possible that He, to avenge a poor, persecuted creature, will not perform a miracle, will not open the door of this stone coffin, of this awful fatal dungeon?

CHAPTER XXV.

FATHER PETER ANDREEF.

THE last warm days of autumn had already passed, and cold and gloomy November had brought its rains and mists.

Father Peter Andréef, the high priest of the Cathedral of Kazan, was a man in the prime of life, highly educated and well read.

In the autumn of 1775 he was expecting from Tchernigoff, his niece and god-daughter Vâra. She had written to her uncle, that she would arrive in Petersburg with a companion, a young lady, who was coming in the hope of presenting personally to the empress a petition on a very important subject. The little house of Father Peter, with an *entresol*,¹ and a *perron* standing out in the street, was built behind the cathedral, and stood by the side of the palace of the Hetman, Razoumovski. The old oaks and the lindens threw their shade over its red-tiled roof,

¹ *Entresol*, a suite of apartments between ground and first floor.

even extending their wide-spreading branches over the priest's little yard.

A widower for already several years, the childless Father Peter led the life of a hermit. His gates were always closed, and an enormous watch-dog, Polkan, on hearing the slightest noise would bark in the most furious fashion. The few and far between visitors who wished to speak to the priest always came through the street-door, which was also kept constantly closed. The letter of his niece gave a great deal of pleasure to Father Peter, but he also found in it something very extraordinary. Vâra wrote to him, that the young mistress of the neighbouring estate had a little while ago received from abroad, together with a letter addressed to her, a packet of papers covered with writing, which, as the letter told her, had been found on the sea-shore in a bottle. "Dear godfather and uncle, forgive my foolishness," wrote Vâra to her uncle, "but after having read these papers together, the young lady and I have decided on coming to Petersburg, and we shall soon be there. Whom could I recommend the unfortunate orphan to go to if not you. She buried her parents a year ago. In the papers sent her there is so much concerning an important person, that before decid-

ing on speaking about it, there is a great deal to think over. First, the young lady thought of sending the papers to Moscow, to the empress, but on reflection we decided otherwise. You, dear uncle, know everything. You go everywhere, you are respected by every one, therefore you can easily advise us what to do. The name of the young lady is Irena Lvovna, and her surname—she is the daughter of the Brigadier Rakitin.”

“Ah! youth, youth!” thoughtfully shaking his head, said the priest on reading this letter. “Ah! the magpies, what crazy ideas! to come all the way from Tchernigoff to Petersburg to get my advice. . . . They’ve fallen—well—they’ve found some one!”

Every evening, at twilight, Father Peter was wont to light the candles, and having put on his house cassock, to walk up and down the little linen drugget which ran through all the rooms, from the little hall, through the drawing-room, dining-room, and into the bedroom. He would look after his plants, especially his geraniums, standing on the window-sills; pull off the dry leaves and pick out the weeds; and would arrange the books on the table, and gaze at his favourite blackbird asleep in its cage, at the

“ikons” and images in the corner, at the lighted lamp, and would begin musing and thinking—when at last would those rooms be filled with mirth and life, when would his magpie come?

The two girls arrived. The house of the priest became at once bright and lively. The sprightly gay Vârushka quite bewildered her uncle with news about his birthplace, their acquaintances, and journey adventures. Listening to her, Father Peter thought within himself, “How time flies! Is it so long ago that she was brought here, a wild, snub-nosed, and sulky little lass? and now—look at her, so sprightly, so gay, so clever! Yes, and her companion, she is a beauty! Those thick black braids, and what eyes! But quite in another style to my Vâra; so thoughtful, discreet, serious and proud!”

After the first joyful questions and answers, the priest was obliged to celebrate the vesper service, and his visitors having hastily established themselves in the attic, took everything that was necessary, and started for the bath, accompanied by the cook. On returning home they established themselves in the corner by the fireside, and there Father Peter found them, as red as boiled lobsters, their heads tied up with coloured hand-

kerchiefs, drinking tea. It was long past midnight when they at last rose to go to bed.

“ Well ! my young lady, and where are the papers you have brought with you ? ” said Father Peter, rising. “ It interests me also ; what is it all about ? ”

The girls began searching in their bundles, found the roll—on it was the inscription, “ Diary of Lieutenant Konsov.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE VISITORS' QUEST.

FATHER PETER retired to his chamber, drew the curtains, put the candle on the night-table, threw himself without undressing on the bed, unrolled the crumpled manuscript of blue foreign note-paper with gilt edges, and began reading. He did not close his eyes till morning.

The whole history of the Princess Tarakanova, or Princess Wladimirskaya, of which Father Peter had only heard the most contradictory rumours, was now open to him, with unexpected details.

“Ah! that is what it is about,” he thought, on reading the first lines; “about the mysterious Princess.”

Sometimes he would leave off reading the manuscripts, and lie with closed eyes, then again begin to read. “And where now is that poor unfortunate, betrayed girl?” he asked himself, on reading the incident of Livorno. “Where is she now dragging out her miserable existence? And he, who wrote these lines, was he saved?”

One candle after another burnt out. Father Peter finished the manuscript, snuffed out the last little piece of candle, and began walking up and down on the drugget. He went on walking till dawn reminded him that he had not slept all night. "What events! ah! what events! What an unfortunate tissue of incidents!" whispered the priest. "Poor martyr! May God help her!"

The blackbird in the cage woke up, and seeing the very unusual promenade of its master, set up a loud unwonted scream.

"He'll wake every one up," thought the priest.

He returned on tiptoe to his bedroom, threw himself on his bed, and began reflecting on all that he had read. His thoughts wandered to the last reign, to the sea of mysterious and common events, known to others as well as to him; at last he fell asleep.

The sound of the bells ringing for morning service awoke him. The pale November sun was struggling through the curtains. Father Peter locked up the manuscript in the drawer of his table, went to church to celebrate morning service, and returned home, through the back door, into the kitchen. On seeing his god-daughter going up the attic stairs with a hot iron in her hands he beckoned her.

“Tell me, Vâra,” he whispered; “he who wrote that diary—Konsov—must, it’s plain, have been her *fiancé*?”

Vâra moistened her finger and then touched the hot iron; it fizzed.

“He did woo her,” she answered, dangling her iron.

“Well! and what then?”

“Well! Irena Lvovna liked him. Her father would not hear of it.”

“Then the match was broken off?”

“Of course!”

“And now?”

“Well, what can I say? She is an orphan now, and of course would be delighted. She is her own mistress—but where is he?”

“Oh! of course the ship was wrecked,” said Father Peter.

“And in our wilderness, what could we learn about it? Uncle, you might go and make some inquiries of naval people, because, you see, not only the command was lost, but all the count’s riches. . . . Somewhere, you would be sure to learn something.”

“Who sent your friend this diary?”

“God alone knows. The post brought it; Irisha received it. On the roll was only

‘Rakitin,’ and the address ; and in the note, written in French, it was merely said that the manuscript had been found by some fishermen in a bottle on the sea-shore. Irena is now the only survivor of Rakitin . . . and so of course she received it.”

The priest, without saying anything either to his niece or her friend, began most energetically to make inquiries in all directions, but his efforts were fruitless.

The only information he gained at the Marine Department was that the frigate, *The Northern Eagle*, which was laden with the rich collections of Count Orloff, had been driven along into the Atlantic Ocean—it had been seen for some time beyond Gibraltar, near the African coast, not far off from Tangiers—and that in all probability it had been shipwrecked and sunk not far from the Azores or the Canaries. Of the fate of Lieutenant Konsov nothing could be gathered ; it was not even known for a surety whether he was on the frigate or not, as the whole of the crew had perished. The commander of the squadron, and Admiral Greig, were both now in Moscow, and there remained no one else to apply to. There had been some rumours in foreign newspapers that a disabled ship had been seen somewhere about on the ocean, but with no crew on board,

as far as could be noticed ; it was being driven by the storm in the direction of the Azores or Madeira. The violence of the storm had effectually prevented any efforts being made to rescue it.

“Poor young girl ! ” thought the priest, looking at Rakitina ; “so clever, so modest, so rich, and so young. They would have been a couple, if God had only spared him ! No, he must be dead. Had he been alive, he would have sent some token to his native land, to his fellow officers, to his relations.”

Once, when he had some spare time, he took the opportunity of speaking with Irena.

“Young lady,” said he, “I have heard from my niece of your loss. Of course, it is plain your enemies had their own reasons for separating you from your wooer and giving you another. Why did it all happen ? Why was Konsov treated with such disdain ? ”

“I know not myself,” answered Irena. “My late father was very fond of Pavel Efstaftitch, was always very kind to him, treated him not only as a near neighbour, but as one dear to him. And I, what words can describe my love for him ? I lived only in his love.”

“Well, then, how came this separation about ? ”

“Oh, don’t ask me,” said Irena, covering her

face with her hands. "It is such anguish to me—such grief. We saw each other often, corresponded; we used to have meetings. I gave him my word; we were only awaiting a fitting time to tell all to my father."

Rakitina was silent for some minutes.

"Oh, it is dreadful to recollect it all!" she continued. "I suppose some one must have calumniated Konsov to my father. All at once—it was evening—I saw the horses being put to the carriage. 'Where to?' I asked. My father would answer nothing. My things were carried out, put into the carriage. At that time a relative from Petersburg was on a visit to us. We three took our seats in the carriage. 'Where to?' I again asked my father. 'Oh, hereabouts, not very far; we will just have a drive,' said my father, joking. Yes; it turned out a nice joke! We went on with post-horses, without one relay, as far as our other property, one thousand versts¹ distant. I could neither write nor send any message to Konsov for a long time, I was watched so closely. It was only when my father fell dangerously ill that I implored him not to break my heart, but to allow me to write to Konsov. He began crying bitterly, and said, 'Forgive me,

¹ 663 miles.

Irisha. We have both been deceived cruelly.' 'What? what?' I could only ask. 'Is it possible that that cousin sought my hand?'

"'Not your hand, my dear, but the money,' my father said. 'He intercepted one of Konsov's letters to you, and so stirred up my anger against him, that I decided on carrying you off. Forgive me, Irenushka, forgive me. God has punished him, the wicked one. He borrowed a large sum from me, lost it at cards in Moscow, and has blown his brains out. He left a letter . . . there it is, read it . . . I received it a few days ago.'

"My poor father did not live long after this. I returned to my own property, but of Konsov I could get no tidings. His grandmother was also dead. I wrote to Petersburg, whence he had started, wrote into foreign parts, to the fleet; but then, war was raging, and of course he did not get my letters. Then his captivity in Turkey . . . then . . . and that is all my sad fate."

"Pray, my dear young lady, pray," said the priest. "Your lot is a bitter one; only the good God above can help you."

Meantime, several days passed by. Rakitina, ceaselessly without respite, went about gathering all the information she could, regretting neither time nor money, but all was of no avail.

"I can see, Irena Lvovna," said Father Peter to his guest one day, "that you are constantly going about, first to one, then to another, troubling yourself and all for nothing. I have heard it said that the empress will not be here for some time yet; why should you not write to the superior officer of Pavel Efstaftch, to Moscow? may not the Count Orloff know of something?"

"Thank you, Father," answered Rakitina, bowing. "Let us pray God that we may learn something about that unfortunate ship without a crew, and if no one else were saved, perhaps Konsov. . . . Yesterday Count Pânin promised me to get some information from a foreign Marine Department—in Spain—in Madeira; Von Viesing, the author, has also offered his services. Shall I not hear of something? I shall wait a little longer; still I ought to be going home, but how can I go without any hope! Oh! that unfortunate ship, it haunts me night and day! . . ."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A LATE VISITOR.

THE evening of the 1st of December, 1775, was particularly wet and windy. The snow which had fallen in the morning was now all melted ; there were pools of water everywhere ; the few and far between carriages and pedestrians gloomily splashed along the streets. There was a storm. The wind howled over the house of the priest, shaking the shutters, and bending the enormous trees in the garden of the Hetman. The Neva was swollen ; an inundation was imminent. From time to time could be heard the gloomy sound of the cannon from the fortress.

Father Peter was in the attic with the girls, and very thoughtful. The conversation could not be kept up to the accompaniment of the howling wind ; it frequently had to be broken. Vâra was telling the cards ; Irena appeared very displeased, and was relating with a very discontented face what leeches the secretaries in the Foreign Department were, the interpreters, and even the

very scribes. Notwithstanding the orders and personal interest of Count Pânin, they had as yet done nothing in Spain or on the islands. Projects were made on paper, copied, translated, everything, only to drag on.

“ You should just oil a little . . . through the servants, or somehow,” said the priest.

“ Oh ! she gave without stint,” answered Vâra for her friend.

“ Oh ! those laggards,” said Father Peter. “ Yes, it’s high time our empress should return from Moscow. We are badly off without her.”

The rain beat furiously on the windows like hail. The poor trembling drenched dog had hidden himself in his kennel, as though acknowledging that in such a storm, and with the cannon firing, no one would take the trouble to disturb him. All at once, after one of the booms of the cannon from the fortress, the dog began to bark most angrily, and, above the roar of the wind, the noise of the shutting of the gate was distinctly heard. Both girls shivered.

“ Axenia is asleep,” said Father Peter, speaking of the cook. “ Some one wants me, I suppose, and could not make himself heard at the front door.”

“ Uncle, I’ll go and open it,” said Vâra.

“ Oh ! with your courage ! You’d better sit still.”

The priest, taking the candle in his hand, went down and opened the door. There entered a not very tall, but stout man, with a red face. He had a cocked hat and sword, and seemed as if he had got rather wet while waiting at the *perron* to have the door opened.

“ Secretary to the commander-in-chief, Oushakoff,” said he, shaking himself. “ I am come to you on a secret mission.”

The priest felt a little frightened. He remembered the papers brought by Rakitina. He shut the door, and invited his guest into the study, lighted a second candle, and having given his visitor a chair, took one himself and sat down to listen.

“ ‘ The Sermons of Massillon ? ’ ” said Oushakoff, rubbing his cold hands, and looking at the book of celebrated sermons lying on Father Peter’s table. “ Then I suppose you know the French language well ? ”

“ I understand it a little,” said the priest, thinking within himself, “ What can he want with me at this late hour ? ”

“ Very probably, Batiushka, you understand German also ; and, who knows, perhaps Italian ? ”

“ I learnt German, and of course Italian resembles Latin very closely.”

“ Consequently,” continued the stranger, “ you know a little of those languages ? ”

“ Well ! here’s a Preceptor come to examine me,” thought the priest.

“ Yes ! a little,” he answered.

“ Is it not strange, Father Peter, such questions ; especially in the middle of the night ? ” said the stranger. “ Now, confess ; you do find it strange ? ”

“ Yes ! it is rather late,” said the priest, gaping and looking at him.

Oushakoff crossed one leg over the other, and looking up to the wall, saw a portrait of the then disgraced Archbishop Arsénia Matzaevitch, and thought to himself, “ Ah ! well, he sympathises with that scoundrel. I shall have to be very determined with him, very brusque ! ”

“ I will not delay any longer,” said he. “ This is what it is. His Grace, the commander-in-chief, desires your Right Reverence to take all the necessary vessels, and immediately, without any delay, to follow me . . . to a foreigner —of the Grecian Faith. . . . ”

“ But what is all this about ? ”

“ To celebrate two Sacraments.”

“But which ?”

“Excuse me, but is it necessary for you to know, beforehand ?” answered Oushakoff. “There must be no hesitation. The orders come from high powers.”

“I must get everything ready,” answered the priest, “so I must know which.”

“First Baptism, then Confession, and Holy Communion,” answered Oushakoff.

“Now, in the night ?”

“Just so. A carriage is waiting.”

“May I take the clerk ?”

“The orders are, ‘without any witnesses.’”

“Where is it, if I may ask ?”

“I cannot answer. You will know all afterwards. Now, only one thing ; there must be no delay, and the most profound secrecy,” said Oushakoff, with a haughty inclination of his head, although in earnest of his request, he pressed with both his hands his cocked hat, dripping with the rain, to his breast.

“May I at least tell my household, and allay their anxiety ?”

Oushakoff knit his brows, and silently shook his head. The priest took the cross and books, called to Vâra in the attic to shut the door, and by the time his niece had descended, the carriage

was rolling noisily away in the street. Driving up to the palings of the church, Father Peter woke up the clerk, went into the church, and took the chalice.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BAPTISM.

THE carriage stopped at the house of the Commander-in-Chief Galitzin. The prince was informed of the arrival of the priest, and ordered him to be brought to his bedroom, where he was awaiting him in his dressing-gown.

“*Mille pardons, Batiushka,*” said the prince, hurriedly dressing. “Most important affair; by orders of the highest authority. You must first give me your oath that you will be silent for ever on everything heard and seen this night. Do you swear?”

“As one offering up a bloodless sacrifice,” answered Father Peter, “I will be faithful to my Sovereign, without any oaths.”

Galitzin was a little embarrassed at first, but he did not insist. He related to the priest a few of the circumstances concerning the captive.

“Did you ever hear anything of her before?” he asked the priest.

“Yes! a few rumours did reach me. . . .”

“Have you heard that she is now in Petersburg?”

“I hear it for the first time.”

Galitzin told him of the anxiety of the empress, of the several foreign inimical parties, and of the false wills.

“The doctor has quite given her up,” added the fieldmarshal. “Not only her days, but her hours are numbered.”

Father Peter crossed himself.

“She wishes to be prepared,” continued the prince, as if choosing his words. “It is not for me to teach you what to do. Most probably, like a good shepherd, you will lead her to a full Confession and Repentance as to who she is, and if she has taken a name not belonging to her, and who incited her to do it? . . . Will you do this?”

The priest lingered with his answer.

“Give your word that you will help justice.”

“I know my duty and my obligations as minister of God,” answered Father Peter, drily, coughing.

“You may go,” said the prince, bowing. “You will be conducted where you are needed. As to me, I hope you will excuse the trouble I have given you at such a late hour.”

The carriage, with the priest and Oushakoff, took the road to the fortress. At the door of the commandant's they noticed another carriage.

The priest was led into a special room, where he saw the Général Procureur, Prince Viazimski. Near the prince stood the tall, manly, ruddy-faced commandant of the fortress, Tchernishoff, and, near the latter, his still young-looking and smartly dressed wife.

“Is everything ready?” asked Viazimski, looking round.

“Everything is ready,” answered the *Commandantsha*,¹ trembling and bowing in her rustling farthingale.

“Be so good as . . .” said the Prince Viazimski to the priest.

They all went into the next room, where candles in the tall silver candlesticks had already been lighted. Between them stood a font, and near it a woman, commonly dressed, and holding in her arms something wrapped in white.

“Begin, Holy Father,” said Viazimski, pointing to the font and to what the woman held.

Father Peter put on his vestments, took the

¹ A wife, in Russia, always takes her husband's title, adding only a feminine suffix.

censer from the hands of Tchernishoff, opened the Prayer-Book, and began the ceremony.

The sponsors were the finely dressed, affected wife of the commandant, and the général procureur himself.

They gave the newly christened babe the name of Alexander. The ceremony was finished ; the *commandantsha*, with the babe in her arms, continued turning and twisting about, trying with her airs and graces to attract the attention of the général procureur to herself and her rustling silk dress.

"Whose child ?" asked the priest, lowering his voice, and respectfully inclining the cross towards the godfather, who drew near.

Viazimski looked at him, quite taken aback.

"Under what name must I inscribe him in the register ?" asked Father Peter. "Who are the parents ?"

"But is that absolutely necessary ?" asked the général procureur, in a displeased voice.

"As you may order. . . . By right, the ceremony requires it. Who knows what may happen in the future ? . . . We are bound. . . ."

"Right," said Viazimski. "Alexander Alexéef, son of Chesmenski."

The priest silently, with a trembling hand, inscribed the name in the baptismal register.

“Now another Sacrament. . . . Here is your guide,” said the Prince Viazimski sighing, pointing to the smart commandant, who was standing drawn up to his full height. “I hope that everything will be fulfilled according to orders.”

With these words, he left the room and drove home.

Father Peter, holding the chalice to his breast, followed Tchernishoff. His heart beat faster when, having crossed the little bridge in the interior, they entered a special yard, surrounded by a high wall. He at once understood that they had entered the fatal Ravelin of Alexéef. . . .

The priest and his guide, mounting a few steps, entered a long, dimly lighted corridor, and stopped before a low door.

“She is here,” whispered the priest to himself. The door led into a rather low but very comfortable room. There were no sentinels now. The candle near the bed shed a feeble light on the other part of the room, through a purposely arranged silk curtain. The room was close, and a faint odour of medicine and incense pervaded it. The priest glanced around, and silently stepped behind the screen.

The sick girl lay motionless on her bed, but was quite conscious.

She slowly raised her eyes to the visitor, and recognising that it was the priest by his dress, gently sighed, and held out her hand.

"I am very, very glad, Holy Father," she whispered in French. "Perhaps you would prefer German?"

"*Oui ! Oui, comme il vous plaît,*" stammered Father Peter, shivering involuntarily at the sound of that deep, broken contralto.

"I am ready; ask," stammered the captive. "Pray for me."

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONFESSiON AND ABSOLUTION.

THE priest carefully put the chalice on the table, drew a chair near the bed, passed his fingers through his bushy hair, and glancing at the image over the head of the sick girl, gently bent over her.

“Your name?” he asked.

“Princess Elizabeth. . . .”

“I conjure you, speak the truth,” continued Father Peter, trying to recollect the French words. “Who were your parents, and where were you born?”

“I swear by the Almighty God that I do not know,” answered the captive, with a hollow cough. “I knew and believed only what others told me.”

She answered all the other questions in a voice broken and so low as to be scarcely heard. She touched lightly on her childhood, the South of Russia, the village where she had lived, Siberia, her flight to Persia, and her residence in Europe.

"You are a Christian?" asked the priest.

"I was baptized into the Russian faith, and therefore look upon myself as belonging to the Russian Church, although until now, for many reasons, I have been deprived of the blessings of Confession and Holy Communion. . . . I have sinned a great deal. Trying to tear myself from my awful position, I gave my friendship to people who only betrayed me. . . . Oh, how thankful I am for your visit!"

"Among your papers were found two wills. . . . From whom did you receive them, and—hide nothing from God and from me—by whom was your Manifesto to the Russian fleet written?"

"All that was sent to me quite ready by persons quite unknown to me," said the sick girl. "I had secret friends who pitied me. They tried to restore to me my lost rights."

"But what is this?" thought the bewildered priest, listening to her. "Is all this fiction or truth? If this is deceit, my God, at what a moment!"

"You are on the borders of the grave," said he, in a trembling voice; "on the verge of eternity. . . . Repent. . . . Between us there is only one witness—God."

The penitent struggled within herself. Her

bosom rose and fell, and her hand convulsively clutched her handkerchief and held it to her lips.

“ In expectation of God’s judgment and my near death,” said she, turning her eyes to the image of the Saviour, “ I confess and swear that all that I have told you and others is the truth. I know nothing more. . . .”

“ But all this is impossible,” said Father Peter, in an agitated voice. “ All that you have told me is so very improbable.”

The poor girl closed her eyes, as if from unendurable acute suffering. Large tears rolled down her thin and faded cheeks.

“ Who were your accomplices ? ” asked the priest, after a short pause.

“ Oh, no one ! Have pity, have mercy ; . . . and if I, weak, persecuted, without means. . . .”

The Princess did not finish. A hollow cough shook her frame. She suddenly raised herself, clutched at her breast, at the bed, and fell back, apparently lifeless.

The fainting fit lasted several minutes. Father Peter, thinking she was dying, began reading the prayers. The sick girl came to herself.

“ Do not agitate yourself ; be calm,” said the priest, noticing she was coming to.

“Oh, I cannot any more! Leave me! Go away!” murmured the sick girl. “Another time. . . . Let me rest.”

“I have just christened your son,” said the priest, wishing to give her a little courage. “I wish you joy for him. God is merciful; you may yet live for him. . . .”

A faint smile came on the poor parched lips of the captive. Her eyes wandered aimlessly around, as though seeing beyond that room, that fortress, beyond everything surrounding her, far away. . . .

Father Peter blessed the poor girl, gazed at her for some time, took the chalice, and having postponed the celebration of the Holy Communion, left the room.

“Well! what?” asked the commandant, who was waiting for him in the corridor; “has she confessed, communicated?”

The priest inclined his head, silently bowed to the commandant, entered the carriage, and left the Ravelin.

On the morning of the 2nd of December, he was asked to come to the fortress, and to bring the Elements of the Eucharist with him. The sick girl was fading rapidly.

“Think well, my daughter, and ease your soul,

by repentance," exhorted the priest. "I conjure you, in the name of God, for the sake of the future life!"

"I am a sinner," answered the dying girl, in a strangely quiet voice; "from my very youth I have sinned against God, and feel myself to be a great impenitent sinner."

"I absolve thee from thy sins, my daughter," said the priest, devoutly praying and blessing her; "but thy Pretendership, thy sins against the empress,—thy accomplices?"

"I am a Russian grand-duchess! the daughter of the late empress," faintly murmured the captive, hardly moving her benumbed lips. The priest bent over her to administer the Sacrament; but the captive lay motionless, almost lifeless.

CHAPTER XXX.

“WHAT IF THE CAPTIVE BE INNOCENT?”

FATHER PETER returned home in a very agitated frame of mind. “Is she a usurper?” thought he. “Of course, man will stick to anything in his own interests. But dying—almost with her last breath, after such terrible privations, almost torture! What if she’s innocent, not an adventuress? remembers her childhood, repeats always the same—of course, in all this, she is the only witness. Is it her fault that her proofs are so scanty, so insignificant?”

The priest, on coming home, went straight to his study. Having learnt that the girls were not at home, he lighted his stove, shut the door, and once more took the diary of Konsov in his hands. Having again glanced over the manuscript, he wrapped it in a sheet of paper, tied it round with a string, sealed it, and wrote on the outside paper—“To be opened only after my death.” This roll he put at the bottom of a trunk, where he kept many precious documents and manuscripts.

He had hardly shut the lid down, when a knock was heard at the door.

“Who’s there?”

“Friends!” and his niece entered with Rakitina.

“What is the matter with you, dear uncle,” asked Vâra, looking at the priest; “you look agitated—this is the second day you’ve been out driving? . . .”

Irena looked at him inquiringly. “Perhaps he has some news for me,” thought she.

“About other people’s business; of no interest to you, my dear; and you, Irena Lvovna, be magnanimous and forgive me,” continued the priest, turning round to Rakitina. “Times are troublous, it is now too dangerous to keep the manuscripts you brought from home. I know you will soon go away, but the village even is not safe. You’ll forgive an old man.”

Irena turned pale.

“All sorts of rumours are floating about—search may be made,” continued Father Peter. “Scold me, young lady, but your manuscript. . . .”

“Where is it? oh, you’ve not burnt it?” cried Irena, involuntarily glancing at the lighted stove.

Father Peter silently bowed.

Irena clasped her hands.

“Oh! my God!” she cried, unable to keep back her tears; “the last consolation, the last token of remembrance, and that is gone! What shall I carry away with me now?”

Vâra looked reproachfully at her uncle.

“Afterwards, dear young lady; in time you shall know everything, but now it is better to be silent,” said the priest in a decided voice. “God’s ways are not our ways. The enemy’s path is full of snares. Pray to God; He will have mercy.”

But the priest was not to be left in peace. That very day he was again called to the commander-in-chief.

“Well, did you get anything from the captive?” asked Galitzin.

“Excuse me, your Grace,” answered Father Peter, “but the secrets of the Confession. . . . No! I cannot, I dare not.”

Galitzin became embarrassed.

“What a commission!” thought Galitzin, blushing. “Ah, those counsellors. . . . Orloff, you can see, unable to rest, is again inventing something at Moscow, and I—play the Inquisitor. . . .”

“Well, Batiushka! that’s my orders from high . . .”

“I cannot, your Grace; ‘twould be against my conscience.”

Galitzin moved his lips, not finding a way out of his embarrassment.

“Who *is* she?” said he, trying to look very important and determined. “Cannot you see this is a State secret, a most important one. You see I must send a report. There will be inquiries; I’m answerable for everything, for order. Here, I . . . I alone!”

“One thing I may tell your Grace—while I am alive, I’ll keep the oath exacted by you.”

The field-marshall was all ears.

“I’ll not let one word fall of what I heard at the Confession,” continued Father Peter. “You exacted from me an oath of silence, but I can inform you of one thing, prince, although it is my own personal opinion: the captive has been much calumniated, a great deal has been invented, . . . and what if she. . . .”

“Oh! speak, speak!” said the field-marshall.

“What if the captive were innocent?” said the priest; “why should she suffer all that?”

If a thunderbolt had fallen at the feet of the prince, he could not have been more wonderstruck.

“You assure me—do you mean to say, that she

had no accomplices?" said he; "that she was no traitor? But then, am I to understand that she is our own truly born grand-duchess! But is it possible? No, not for one minute can I think it!"

Father Peter, with his head bent down, was silent.

"No! you make a mistake, that's all a dream, delirium," cried out the field-marshall, clutching at the bell rope. "Horses!" he called to the orderly, who at once came in, "I'll try; time is not yet quite lost. I'll see for myself."

CHAPTER XXXI.

RELEASE.

“ Oh ! I myself have sinned against her in my reports,” thought Galitzin, on his way to the fortress. “ I fell under the influence of others, hastened on everything without judgment. I grasped at the guessings and conjectures of others ! ”

The ice on the surface of the Neva was still under water, the remains of the previous day’s inundation. The prince’s carriage drove on very slowly, and with difficulty through the pools of water. He did not find the commandant at home. Ever since evening the latter had been in the Ravelin. At the door stood Oushakoff with papers in his hand. He walked up to the prince, and was beginning—

“ As your Grace knows, the expenses for this person. . . . ”

“ Lead me to the captive,” said the prince, addressing the officer on guard, and turning his back on Oushakoff. “ Umph ! found occupation !

—And our sick captive? Is she still conscious?"

"She is dying," answered the officer.

Galitzin devoutly crossed himself.

On entering the Ravelin, he met Tchernishoff. The prince did not recognise him. The brave, fine, spruce officer, Tchernishoff, who was never once in his life embarrassed by his service, was now quite bewildered and pale as death.

"Poor thing!" murmured the field-marshall, following Tchernishoff. "Can it be that she will die? Has the doctor been?"

"He has not left her since evening; the agony has already begun, she is quite unconscious. She is raving!"

"What does she rave about? Speak, speak!" and the agitated prince leant forward to Tchernishoff. "Were you there? Did you hear her ravings?"

"I went in several times," answered the commandant. "I only heard some unintelligible words, amongst them Orloff . . . Princess . . . Gran Dio . . . Mio caro . . ."

"And the child?" asked the prince, dashing away a tear.

"Is well, your Grace, in the hands of a wet nurse. My wife found a very good one."

“See that everything necessary is found—everything. Do you hear me, sir? everything,” said the prince very seriously and impressively, trying to give his voice a most imperious and commanding tone. “In a Christian manner, do you understand? . . . In case; here . . . in secret . . . you understand me? without any fuss . . . suffering humanity . . . a martyr.”

The prince wanted to say something more, but could only sob. Tears were choking him. He merely nodded, and, pulling himself together as well as he could, he briskly walked out on the *perron*. Here he glanced at the dismal grey sky, covered with big heavy clouds. A whole flight of ravens was whirling round over the Ravelin. The iron leaves¹ of the roof, half torn away by the storm, were creaking dismally. The field-marshall drew his sable collar close round him, jumped into his carriage, and shouted, “Home!”

“God has had pity on her, poor thing; in past years, how often these small casemates have been flooded during the inundations. Yes, of course, it’s quite clear,” he went on musing. “The unfortunate girl has only been a toy in the hands of

¹ In Russia the roofs of all Government buildings and of substantial houses are made of iron sheets painted dark red or bright green.

others. A usurper or not, who can tell? That's just what I shall write to Her Imperal Highness —her death will not be on our heads."

The carriage rolled along quickly over the newly-fallen snow, now passing carts loaded with wood or hay, now an elegant carriage, or a pedestrian feeling his way carefully through the pools and the snow,—those very same houses, churches, the same bridges, ensigns, that the prince had looked at for so many years, rushed past unnoticed by the now anxious and gloomy commander-in-chief of the northern capital. Then came the Police Department, at the Green Bridge over the Nevski, and at last the apartment of the field-marshall. His heart was very heavy.

"Well! and if, after all, she's no pretender," flashed through the mind of the prince, as he saw the Elizabeth Palace rising in the gloom, near the bridge on the Moika, and a little farther on, on the Nevski, the Anitchkoff Hall, the residence of Razoumovski.

Galitzin remembered now all the late reign, the great of that time, his connections, his own youthful years, and the years and persons that time had carried away.

* * * * *

On the evening of 4th of December, 1775, the

Princess Tarakanova, Dame d'Azow, Ali Emeté, and Princess Wladimirskaya, expired. No one was present at her last moments; she was found lying still, as though she had fallen asleep. Her dim open eyes were fixed on the image of the Saviour. On the next day the invalid watch of the garrison of the Petropavlovski fortress dug a grave, with the help of crow-bars¹ and spades, in the middle of the little yard in the Ravelin of Alexéef, under the shade of the lindens. And there, secretly from all, they buried the body of the unfortunate girl, filling the grave up with clods of frozen earth. The invalid watchman, Antipitch, on his own initiative, planted a birch tree over that grave. The servitors of the Princess, her maid Meshade, and secretary Charnomski, as the inquest now was terminated, were sent away to foreign parts, after having been sworn to secrecy.

Father Peter guessed at the death of the captive, from the tears and insinuations of the *commandantsha*, and said to himself, "Oh, God! Thou hast at last delivered the poor unfortunate captive from her burden, and given rest to her soul." And, without any fuss or noise, went immedi-

¹ These are always used instead of picks, as the ground here is sometimes frozen more than a yard deep.

ately to the church and celebrated a funeral mass, for the fallen asleep bond-slave of God, Elizabeth ; and at the oblation, remembering her soul, cut a small piece from the consecrated loaf.

“ For whom did you have that funeral mass ? ” asked Vâra of her uncle, noticing the loaf on the breakfast table.

“ For that person you know of, that poor sufferer.”

“ But who was she ? ”

“ A slave, and child of a bond-slave,” mysteriously answered Father Peter. “ We are all in the hands of God, the rich and the poor, the slaves and the kings.”

* * * * *

The Field-Marshal Galitzin was unable for a long time to decide on the means of letting the empress know of the death of Tarakanova. He would take a pen, write a few lines, dash them out, and again begin thinking.

“ Ah ! come what may,” said he to himself, “ the dead will not be called to account, and for the living, it's a vindication.”

The prince took out a clean sheet of paper, dipped his pen in the ink, and began very carefully to trace, in an old-fashioned hand, the following words :—

“The person so well known to your Imperial Highness as having usurped a name and rank not belonging to her, died on the 4th of December, an unrepentant sinner, having confessed to nothing and betrayed no one.”

“And if any of the great should learn anything about her, and let it out,” thought Galitzin to himself, “we can set rumours afloat that she was drowned in the inundation. Just at that very time, they fired enough cannon from the fortress, and the lovely Neva played her pranks.”

And this is the origin of the legend of the drowning of Tarakanova.¹

* * * * *

Irena Lvovna Rakitina, after having gone about from department to department, was at last convinced of the hopelessness of her case, and returned to her native village accompanied by Vâra. This was in December, 1775. In Moscow, she tried to give a personal petition to the empress, but this was just the day before the departure of Ekaterina for Petersburg. The petition of Irena was graciously accepted; but somehow very likely, in the confusion dependent on the departure of the Court,—it got lost and was forgotten, as she never received any answer or resolution.

¹ See Frontispiece.

Irena, while at Moscow, determined to find out Orloff, but afterward was dissuaded from her purpose.

On her arrival in Petersburg, the empress most assiduously questioned Galitzin about the last days of the captive; and notwithstanding all the endeavours of the old man to soften his tale, she understood what an awful tragedy had overtaken the blind victim of foreign intrigue.

“Yes; you and I, prince, have also ‘oversalted’ it!” said Ekaterina. “Why not more frankness with me?”

* * * * *

“I am the cause of everything,” decided Irena, after long hours of doubt and anguish. “I was the cause of Konsov’s leaving his native land. It was on my account he gave way to despair, and tried to help that unfortunate person, and then perished. I must make amends now for his broken life, and implore God to forgive me my share of sins in all this unhappy affair. I am now alone, and have nothing to expect from the world.”

In 1776, Rakitina left her estate in the hands of her father’s serfs, and accompanied by Vâra (who had that year become engaged to one of the

teachers of the Muscovite Seminary), started for a small nunnery not far from Kieff, and entered it as a novice, hoping soon to be able to take the veil. However much Vâra implored her, or tried to convince her, to dissuade her from taking such a step, Irena was firm, and having put on the hood and nun's dress, repeated only one thing—“I am the cause of all, and therefore must pray for him, and suffer all my life.” But Irena could not give up all her thoughts to prayer, however much she wished to.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“A ROSE AND A MYRTLE.”

FIVE years passed by, and in May, 1780, Rakitina was again in Petersburg. Her friend Vâra was already married and in Moscow. Father Peter was, as before, priest of the Cathedral of Kazan. Irena went to see him. He was delighted and eagerly began to ask her about past and present events.

“Is it possible that you are even till now waiting and hoping that your *fiancé* is yet alive?” he asked. “For how many years you are uselessly tormenting yourself! Were he alive, be sure he would have sent some message—I do not say to you—to his friends, to his relations.”

“Oh! don’t, don’t, Father,” answered Irena, drying her eyes; “I will give up all, sacrifice everything. . . .”

“Young lady, that is a sin; you are tempting Providence, you are imitating the heathens.”

“But what can I do?” answered Irena; “I am always seeing such awful prophetic dreams,

one especially. Oh ! that dream; it came to me not long ago, several nights together." . . . Irena was silent.

"What dream was it? Tell me all; confide in me."

"It seemed to me that he approached my bedside—he was not a bit altered—just as he was the last time I saw him in our village, stately, handsome, amiable; and he said to me, 'I am still alive, Irenushka. Where the sea murmurs, night and day, I look for you, morning and evening, thinking perhaps you'll come, find me, and set me free.' . . . Ah ! tell me, where must I look, what must I do, whom must I ask? I dare not trouble the empress another time. . . ."

"I often thought of you," said Father Peter. "Here I only see one person, and that is—the Tzarevitch, Pavel Petrovitch;¹ he is Grand-Master and Protector of the Order of Maltese Knights—he alone can help you. If he will only stoop to you, to your petition, he alone can do something for you. In him you'll find everything—talent, honour, always used in the interest of anything high and noble, secret relations with all the most powerful and celebrated philanthropists.

¹ The heir-apparent, son of Ekaterina, afterwards ascended the throne as Pavel I.

And what goodness, what knightly nobility! No; it is not Tiberius, as his enemies say; it's the future beneficent Titus."

"Yes, I have heard that," answered Irena.

"You have heard? then go to him, find him at his manor house, seek for an audience."

The priest gave Irena all possible information and advice, as well as a letter to his god-daughter, housekeeper in the household of the Tzarevitch. Rakitina hired a *kibitka*¹ and started for Pavlovski, the personal property of the grand-duke.

The housekeeper received Rakitina very hospitably. She took her into her own apartment, and then, to amuse her a little, pointed out to her all the curiosities in the garden and park of the grand-duke; the little cottage Cric-Crac, the hut of the hermit, the caverns, lakes, and rustic bridges. It was decided that Irena should first relate everything to the favourite maid of honour of the grand-duchess, Ekaterina Ivanovna Neldova, who had only just terminated her education at Smolney Institute.²

¹ A hooded sledge, lined with furs, and with large fur curtains and panes of glass let in. It is used for long winter journeys.

² A school in St. Petersburg for the daughters of the nobility, endowed by Ekaterina II.

“When shall we go to see Ekaterina Ivanovna?” said Irena, longing for the promised audience.

“We shall have to wait; she is very much occupied now, learning a hymn on the clavichord. It’s the favourite piece of the grand-duke; she is getting it ready for the concert.”

One day Irena was walking in the park with her hostess. All at once from behind the trees, a fair lady in a light blue silk dress, without any hoops, came towards them.

“Who is that?” asked Irena.

“The Tzarevna,” whispered the housekeeper, bowing very respectfully.

Irena turned faint.

The elegant, though a little inclined to embon-point, Grand Duchess Marie Feodorovna was then twenty-two, and very lovely.

In passing by Irena, she turned her rather bewildered and short-sighted eyes upon her, as though astonished at her nun’s dress. The Tzarevna was followed by a very tall, thin, pock-marked man in a dark *kaftan* and cocked hat, carrying a roll of music and a fiddle under his arm.

“And who is that?” asked Rakitina, when they had gone by.

“ Paëzsillo,” answered the housekeeper; “ music master to her Imperial Highness.”

Irena admired the rare beauty of the Tzarevna, the delicate pink and white complexion, the splendid golden hair, in which nestled some blue and red flowers, contained in a tiny bottle of water to keep them fresh.

The Tzarevna was followed at some distance by two maids of honour. One of them, a short, thin, sprightly brunette, struck Irena by the brightness of her black, sparkling eyes, which literally seemed to shoot forth sparks. She was gaily talking with her companion. It was Neli-dova. Mischievously winking at the stout house-keeper, who was respectfully bowing to her, she said to her with a charming smile, “ I’ve had no time yet, Anna Romanovna,—always that hymn; to-morrow morning.”

“ Ah! at last, to-morrow,” thought Irena, in ecstacy, and following with enraptured eyes the enchanting, elegant fairies, who so unexpectedly had passed before her eyes. At the appointed hour, Anna Romanovna took Irena to the pavilion of the maids of honour, not far from the guard-house, and led her into the drawing-room.

“ It would seem that Ekaterina Ivanovna has

not yet returned from the palace of the grand-duchess," she said ; we will wait for her here, my dear ; take off your hood, it's too warm."

"It does not matter ; I'll leave it."

The room was filled with vases, statuettes, and medallions hung on the walls.

"This is all the work of the grand-duchess," said the housekeeper. "Look here, dear, what talent ! how she paints on porcelain ! And look here, in this black cupboard, these ivory things, that's her work. She can engrave also on stones, on gold, lovely *paysages* ; she can also turn on the lathe, and how fond she is of Ekaterina Ivanovna ! those are all presents to her. Look, she embroidered this beautiful cushion for her. Look, what a rose ! and this myrtle ! What a delicate design, and the colours, you might mistake it for a painting.

Irena gave no answer.

"Why are you so silent, my dear ? What are you thinking about ?"

"A rose and a myrtle," whispered Irena, sighing ; "life and death. What will be the end of all my efforts, my researches, my hopes ?"

At that very minute, the notes of the clavichord were heard from the room of Nelibova. A melodious splendid contralto was singing the

very solemn and sad hymn from Glück's opera, "Iphigenia in Tauridus."

"Well, Irena Lvovna, let us go; I suppose we are too late. Ekaterina Ivanovna is at her music, and no one will dare disturb her. Very likely the grand-duchess is with her now."

Irena made a sign to her companion to wait a little, and with a beating heart she listened to the so well known notes of the imploring hymn of "Iphigenia." In past days she had herself sung that to Konsov. "Oh! if I could only implore them like that; but when will that be? They have their own cares, they have no time," thought she, feeling that her tears were choking her.

"Let us go, let us go," said Anna Romanovna, hastily. They both went out together, went down the steps, round the pavilion of the maids of honour, and into the garden. The wicket-gate banged to.

"Where are you off to?" they heard a voice gaily calling out.

They both raised their eyes. Looking at them from the open window was the smiling face of the black-eyed Nelidova.

"Come in; I'm quite free now. I was waiting for you, and so began to sing. Come in."

The visitors retraced their steps.

Anna Romanovna presented her companion to Nelidova, who made her sit down beside her.

“So young, and yet in such a gloomy dress,” she said; “speak now, without any ceremony, tell me all, I am listening.”

Irena began about Konsov, then went on to the arrest and captivity of Tarakanova. At each of her words, at each detail of the sad event, the bright playful face of Nelidova became more and more troubled and sad.

“Great God! what mysteries, what tragedies!” thought she, shivering; “and all that in our days. But it’s the dark middle ages over again, and no one knowing anything of it.”

“Thank you, Mademoiselle Irena,” said Ekaterina Ivanovna, after having listened attentively to Rakitina. “I am very much obliged to you for all you have related to me; if you will allow me, I will tell it all again to their Imperial Highnesses. . . . I am convinced that the Tzarevitch, that wise just knight, that angel of goodness and honour . . . will do everything for you. But to whom must he apply?”

“How! to whom?” asked the astonished Irena.

“You see, I do not know very well how to

explain it," continued Nelidova; "the Tzarevitch takes no part in State affairs, he can only ask others. On whom does all this depend?"

"The Prince Potemkin might . . ." answered Irena, remembering the counsels of Father Peter, that the Prince could send orders to the different ambassadors and consuls. "Lieutenant Konsov is perhaps now a prisoner of the Moors or negroes, on some wild island in the Atlantic Ocean."

"Will you remain long here?" asked Nelidova.

"The Mother Superior of the Nunnery where I live has been summoning me to return this long while. Every one blames me; calls my researches sinful."

"How and where can I send you a message?"

Irena named the convent, and then became thoughtful, looking at the cushion worked by the grand-duchess.

"I've suffered so much, I've waited so long," she murmured, stifling her tears. "Do not write anything—not one word—but, see, send me, should there be success, a rose; if failure, a myrtle leaf."

Nelidova kissed Irena.

"I will do everything I can," she said gently.

“I will appeal to the grand-duchess, to the Tzarevitch. There remains nothing more for you to do here. Better leave, my dear one; as soon as I learn anything, I will let you know.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PAVEL PETROVITCH AND THE ENCHANTER.

THERE was still no news. It was the beginning of the year 1781. With the retirement of Prince Gregory Orloff, and the fallen fortunes of the tutor of the Tzarevitch, Pânnin, the new counsellors of the Empress Ekaterina, having in view the lessening of the influence of her son, Pavel Petrovitch, advised her to send the Tzarevitch and his wife on a long foreign journey, ostensibly to make the acquaintance of foreign courts.

Irena learnt this with a beating heart from Vâra's letter. Their Imperial Highnesses left the environs of Petersburg on the 19th of September, 1781. Under the name of Count and Countess "du Nord," they passed the Russian frontier of Poland, at the little town of Oukraine, Vasilkoff, in the middle of October.

A young person, dressed in the dark vestments of a nun, who arrived the day before by the Kieff track,¹ was waiting here to meet Nelidova.

¹ That is, the high road from Kieff.

She was taken into the apartment of Ekaterina Ivanovna. Into this room there entered also, from the garden, the Count and Countess du Nord, as if by accident, whilst the horses were being changed. They remained several minutes, and when they came out, the count was fearfully pale, and the countess in tears.

“Poor Penelope,” said Pavel to Nelidova, getting into the carriage, on observing through the trees the dark figure of Irena.

The conversation of Ekaterina Ivanovna with the stranger after the departure of the august travellers was so prolonged that the carriage of the maid of honour was much behindhand, according to the *marche-route*, and the horses had to be cruelly driven to catch up the Imperial carriages.

“A rose, a rose! Not myrtle!” cried out Nelidova in French,—very mysteriously to all around,—to the stranger, to whom she waved her handkerchief from the carriage window, by way of encouragement.

“She is truly a sorrowing Penelope,” said Ekaterina Ivanovna, as, driving away, she lost sight in the distance of the dark motionless figure of Irena.

The journey of the Count and Countess du Nord was very interesting. They travelled

through all Germany, and spent the New Year in Venice. The 8th of January, 1780, the grand-duc, Pavel Petrovitch, wrapped in the picturesque Italian cloak *Tabaro*, and the grand-duc, in the graceful Venetian mantilla and the *Cendadi*, visited the picture gallery and the palace of the Doge in the morning, and in the evening went to the theatre of the “Prophet Samuel,” where “Iphigenia in Tauridus,” was to be played in honour of the august visitors, as it was known to be their favourite opera. The celebrated composer Glück himself conducted the orchestra.

After the opera, the public poured out, and crowded the square of St. Mark, where a national masquerade had been organised in honour of the Imperial travellers.

The square was covered with a noisy, vivacious crowd. Every one noticed that the Count du Nord, after having led the Countess straight from the theatre to the palace which had been prepared for them, was walking, wearing a mask, up and down, a little out of the way of the crowd, with a very tall foreigner, also masked, whom Glück himself had presented to him at the opera.

The full moon shed her silvery light, and all around there were many coloured fires and lamps. The noise and chattering of the mixed crowd

failed to attract the attention of the two interlocutors.

“Who is that?” asked a lady of her husband, turning his attention to the fact that the Count du Nord was attentively listening to the conversation of the foreigner by his side. “Don’t you know him again—the friend of Glück—our celebrated necromancer, our raiser of ghosts?”

Pavel was very much agitated, and in a bad humour. He had wanted to make fun of the stranger, but the recollection of a certain fact had involuntarily embarrassed him.

“You, Enchanter, living, according to your own words, an innumerable number of years,” said he, very politely, although in a slightly mocking tone; “you are in connection not only with the living, but with those beyond the tomb. That is, doubtless, one of your jokes, and I, of course, do not believe one word of it,” he added, trying to be very amiable; “it would be silly to believe such tales. But there are tales and tales, you understand me? . . . I should very much like to question you concerning a certain incident. . . .”

“I am at your orders,” said the stranger.

“For instance,—and this is quite a conversation *à propos*,” continued the Count du Nord; “I

have always been very much interested in the supernatural, especially in the inexplicable interference of supernatural agents in our intellectual life. I should very much like . . . I would ask you, as we have met so unexpectedly, to explain to me one very mysterious event, a very strange meeting. . . .”

“I am quite at your service,” answered the stranger, politely bowing.

His companion walked on a few steps silently.

Pavel struggled within himself, trying to trip up the conjurer, and at the same time to stifle in his own heart something very sad, torturing, which was perhaps one of his mental tribulations. Raising his mask, he wiped his brow.

“I once saw a spirit,” he said, hesitatingly, unable to restrain his emotion; “I saw a shadow, sacred to me . . .”

The stranger bowed slightly, following Pavel, who turned the corner of the square to the dimly-lighted river side.

“It was in Petersburg,” again began the count. He then related to his companion the celebrated fact, already made known somehow abroad, of his having seen the spirit of his ancestor; how, on a certain moonlight night, walking along the streets with his aide-de-camp,

he had felt that between him and the wall of the house on the left side there rose all at once something in a long cloak and old-fashioned cocked hat—how he had “*felt*” that apparition, by the icy cold which had frozen his left side, and with what horror he had followed step by step the apparition, which noisily struck the pavement—it was the noise of stone against stone.

The apparition, invisible to the aide-de-camp, had addressed Pavel in a sad, reproachful voice: “Pavel, poor Pavel, poor prince, do not love the world too much; you will not remain long in it; fear the reproaches of thy conscience; live by the laws of justice . . . in life . . .”

“The apparition did not finish,” said the count. “I still did not understand what it was. At last I looked up and turned giddy; before me, in the full moonlight, stood my grandfather, Peter the Great, just as I remembered him. I recognised directly his caressing look of love, fixed on me. I wanted to ask him . . . but he disappeared, and I remained leaning against the bare, cold wall.” Saying these last words, Pavel again raised his mask, and wiped his face with his handkerchief; he was pale and very much embarrassed. It seemed as though before his eyes there again rose, the dear, sad apparition.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A MYRTLE LEAF.

“WHAT do you think, Signor?” asked the count, after a short pause. “Was it a dream, or did I really see the spirit of my grandfather?”

“It was his spirit,” answered his companion.

“What did his words mean, and why did he not finish them?”

“Would you like to know?”

“Of course.”

“Some one disturbed him.”

“But who?” asked Pavel, continuing to walk along the deserted river side.

“The apparition disappeared at my approach. I was just leaving at that time your banker, Sutherland. You did not notice me, but I saw you both, and I involuntarily startled the apparition of the great man.”

The count stopped; he was amused, and at the same time indignant at the impudence of the magician, and yet there remained something more to be learnt.

“You are joking,” said he. “How is it you were in Petersburg, and no one heard anything of it?”

“I had that pleasure—but for a very short time. I was received in a very unfriendly manner. As a foreigner, and one fond of knowledge, I had expected to obtain more attention. But the first minister offended me deeply; he invited me to leave the country. I withdrew my money from the bankers, and that very same night left Petersburg.”

“Fool, jackanapes!” thought the count, contemptuously smiling; “what inventions, what yarns he can spin.”

“Allow me to offer my apologies for the rudeness of our ministers,” said the count, with the most elaborate politeness, slightly touching his hat with his hand. “But can you explain to me the meaning of the words of the apparition?”

“It would be better not to seek to know the meaning of the apparition,” answered the stranger. “There are things . . . on which it is better to let the Fates be silent. . . .”

At that moment the sounds of a lute came floating from the great lagoon. Some one seated in a gondola was singing. Pavel eagerly listened; it was his favourite hymn. It brought back

to his recollection the Manor of Pavlovski, the musical mornings at Nelidova's, and her intercession for Rakitina.

"Very well," said he; let it be so; the future will reveal the truth. But I have another favour to ask of you. . . . A certain person, whom I wish from my whole heart to help at any cost, would very much like to know one thing."

"I shall be most happy," answered the stranger; "if I can be of any use to your Highness."

"A certain person," continued the count, "begged me to make inquiries here in Italy, in Spain, and in general, of seamen, if a certain naval officer is still living. He was on that ship which was totally shipwrecked, five years ago, and of which literally nothing has been heard."

"A Russian ship?"

"Yes."

"It was carried away, and dashed to pieces by the storm in the ocean, not far from Africa?"

"Yes."

"The *Northern Eagle*?"

"Yes, but how came you to know?"

"It's not in vain I'm called an Enchanter."

"Speak! make haste, was he saved? is he still alive, this officer?" said the count, impatiently.

At that moment they were both standing on the

water side. The silvery waves gently rippled up to the stone steps. In the distance, in the dim twilight, the outline of a ship with her sails furled was just discernible.

“To-morrow,” said the stranger, “I leave Venice on that schooner; but before sailing, or answering your question, I should like—excuse me—to know . . . whether the Count du Nord, on ascending the throne, will be more indulgent to me than the ministers of his august parent? Will he allow me then to visit that country again, whatever the tenor of my answer concerning that naval officer?”

The deep agitation which Pavel had experienced, on relating his adventure with the apparition, had already subsided, and he was regaining his self-composure. The question of the man aroused his indignation.

“Impudent, audacious impostor,” thought he, in a fit of suspicious anger. “What insolence! and what a turn he has given to the conversation. Street acrobat! charlatan! . . .”

Pavel could scarcely contain himself, and crushed his glove in his hand.

“According to your own words it is rather difficult to answer for the future,” said he thoughtfully, after a short pause. “Nevertheless, I am

convinced, that on a second journey to Russia, you will meet with a reception more polite and more befitting a foreigner.

His interlocutor bowed profoundly.

“So you wish to know the fate of that naval officer?” he said.

“Yes,” answered Pavel, prepared, however, to hear some tomfoolery, some imposture.

“Send that certain person awaiting your news a myrtle leaf.”

“How? what did you say? Say it again,” cried out Pavel. “Myrtle! myrtle? then he is lost . . .”

“He was saved on a fragment of the ship near the island of Teneriffe, and for some time remained with the poor monks of the coast.”

“And now? oh! speak, I implore you.”

“A year after he was killed by pirates, who pillaged the monastery where he was living.”

“How did you learn all this?”

“At that time I was myself living on the isle of Teneriffe,” he answered. “I was copying an old Latin manuscript, which was very precious to me, from the archives of the monastery.”

“But what does all this mean? Is he only a juggler, or an all-powerful seer?” thought Pavel, torn with doubts. “A clever diviner, or a bold

charlatan, but from where? . . . All my most secret . . . coast of Africa . . . the name of the lost ship . . . and then that token, the fatal myrtle. Is it possible Ekaterina Ivanovna should have betrayed me? But he never saw her; she is ill, has never been once out of her room, received no visits, and has been nowhere. . . .”

Pavel wanted to say something else, but could find no words.

Beyond the schooner the dawn was breaking.

“I will accompany your Highness to the palace,” said the stranger with elaborate politeness and a cringing bow; “have I your permission?”

Pavel slightly glanced at the tawdry cotton-velvet bespangled costume of the wizard, looking so shabby in the morning light, and taking off his mask, without saying one word more, strode gloomily and proudly along the deserted shore.

“Poor sorrowing Penelope! unfortunate lovely Irena!” thought he. “No one has been able to solve that anguishful enigma—neither ministers, nor knights, nor ambassadors; let us send her the myrtle leaf of the Italian wizard and juggler.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER.

FIFTEEN years had passed away ; the year 1796 was drawing to its end. It was in the beginning of the reign of Pavel I. All Petersburg was hailing joyfully the liberation of the celebrated Novikoff from the fortress, and the return from Siberia of Radischeff. The emperor, with his august consort and several courtiers, went to visit the fortress of Petropavlovski. The chief of the police, Arharoff, asked the emperor if he would not like to visit the Ravelin of Alexéef, where great alterations and repairs were taking place. One of the dungeons attracted the attention of the Imperial visitors.

“Were any Italians ever confined here?” asked the emperor of the commandant.

“Never, your Highness ; only schismatics.”

“Well, look here,” and the Emperor pointed to the window, “here’s an inscription on the glass, cut with a diamond. ‘O, Dio mio.’”

Arharoff and the commandant both bent towards the window eagerly. The commandant

was new, and therefore had not yet had time to become acquainted with all the legends and past days of the fortress.

“It would be very interesting to know,” said the Empress Marie Feodorovna. “It’s a woman’s hand. Poor thing, who could it have been?”

“Was it not Tarakanova?” said Nelidova, standing by. “Have you forgotten, your Highness, the unfortunate Konsov, and the young lady from Little Russia?”

“Tarakanova was drowned here at the time of the inundation,” said somebody.

Every one was silent; the Empress Marie Feodorovna alone looked at Nelidova, and pointed with her eyes out of the window at a solitary silver birch tree, growing in the middle of the little neglected garden of the Ravelin.

“That’s her grave,” she whispered. “Do you remember? But what can have become of the diary?”

It was plain that the emperor had heard the words. As he took his seat in the carriage, he remarked to Arharoff, “At whatever cost this affair must be looked into; a most painful event here took place. They were troublous times; the attempt of Merovitch, the insurrection of Pougachoff, and then . . . this unfortunate . . . I saw my mother’s tears; to her very

last days she could not forgive herself for allowing the poor girl to be interrogated during her absence from Petersburg."

The police were all set on foot.

Somewhere in an almshouse they discovered the poor blind invalid, Antipitch. He had been watchman in the fortress twenty years before. The invalid directed them to a gardener, and this one again to the warden of the cathedral of Kazan, who said that he had found a trunk filled with papers after the death of Father Peter, and that he knew that in it there had been a roll of very important papers. Search was made for the family of Father Peter. He had left no direct heirs, but his grand-niece, the daughter of his niece Vâra, was found. Arharoff went himself to see her, but she knew nothing. No one knew what had become of the trunk of papers of Father Peter, or whether it had been sent to Moscow with his other things. Everything was found out in time. In the poor retired nunnery of the Oukraine, where Irena had sought refuge, after having taken the veil, she peacefully died, at an advanced age, fervently praying for her *fiancé*, the lost Konsov. Amongst the effects of the deceased lay a packet of papers, with the inscription "From Father Peter," and there, together with a letter from a very influential personage, a faded myrtle leaf. A

neighbour, who was very fond of antiquities, had borrowed these papers from the Lady Superior. He had subsequently died abroad.

* * * *

Count Alexis Gregorevitch Orloff-Chesmenski married, the very year that the Count and Countess du Nord were travelling abroad. His illegitimate son by the Princess Tarakanova, Alexander Chesmenski, died, in the rank of Brigadier, at the close of the last century. Having survived the Empress Ekaterina and the Emperor Pavel, the Count Orloff died in Moscow, in the reign of the Emperor Alexander I., on Christmas Eve, 1807, leaving an only unmarried daughter, the well-known Countess Anna Alexéevna. It remains a secret till now whether his conscience tormented him for his treachery to Tarakanova, or whether the stings of remorse had no hold on his hardened soul. However, it is a well-known fact, that the agonies of death must have been for Count Orloff especially terrible, because, in order to drown the horrible screams and groans of the dying "Giant of his time," it was found necessary to make his private orchestra, at that time learning a sonata in the neighbouring pavilion, play as loudly as possible.

THE END.

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